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Fact and Science Fiction

AMAZING

stories

March, 1964
Vol. 38, No. 3

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Illustrating Area of Decisions

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editorial

65

LEWIS CARROLL, as you no doubt know, not only wrote *Alice in Wonderland* to amuse the daughter of a friend of his, Carroll was also an outstanding mathematician of his time, and a bit of a dreamer to boot. The best parts of Carroll, some think, are those parts in which he combines math and dreaming.

One such combination was Carroll's concept for circular billiards. (For the female of the sf species who may not be quite sure of her facts, billiards is played with balls and a cue on a flat rectangular table with pockets in each corner and at the middle of the two longer sides.) The real key to success at pool or billiards is not the player's ability to make the proper strokes with his cue; that is essential, of course, but prerequisite even to that is his ability to calculate visually the angles of impact and rebound that will direct the target ball to the chosen pocket. Now, on a rectangular table, it is not too difficult to gauge these

angles. On a circular table, all hell breaks loose.

Now let's go one step further. Let's postulate a manned orbiting space station, with a large crew that must have recreation. Let's also postulate a mathematical genius who is also a physical education instructor and have him create a game that could only be played in a zero-gravity environment. One such game would be "cubical billiards"—played in a rectangular room whose walls, floor and ceiling were foam-rubber-cushioned, with strategically-placed pockets, and with 36 balls that, once struck, might rebound almost endlessly! That might give even Carroll pause.

* * *

THIS issue marks the debut of Lester del Rey as our new book reviewer, see page 118. We bid him welcome to our pages, and hope that you will enjoy his crotchets and his delights, that you will praise him or denounce him or argue with him.

...or so you say



Dear Editors:

The other day I came across a 1957 copy of AMAZING STORIES and it was awful! I never realized before what a good job you have been doing in the last six years trying to save AMAZING from mediocrepulldom. The difference between that ridiculous old issue and, say, the December issue is great.

I enjoy your magazine and readily defend it from those who say the stories inside are trash. And the thing is, these critics read ANALOG, etc., with an open mind and enjoy it. Their caustic comments lead me to believe that they have never read one of your magazines.

Why haven't they, then? The answer is obvious. The "gee-whiz" old-school science fiction name AMAZING (or FANTASTIC) repels them. Not only do they expect Buck Rogers from your magazine, they'd be afraid to be caught reading that "greasy kid

stuff." A teacher of mine berated me for reading AMAZING STORIES, "such garbage." Three days later, the teacher praised an sf anthology and particularly one of the stories—unaware that it had come from your magazine!

ASTOUNDING STORIES gained a good deal of circulation when it changed its name to ANALOG. I consider your fiction comparable to ANALOG's. (Only there's more of it for the same price!)

And when I make this following statement, I feel I can safely say that not only magazine history but world history backs me: If AMAZING STORIES does not change its name (FANTASTIC, too) to fit the inside and to give the modern s-f reader (the one who started reading it since Sputnik) what he wants, AMAZING STORIES *will perish in the winds*. There are no ifs, ands, or buts. The name "AMAZING" is 1930-ish, behind-the-times, unsuitable for

(continued on page 122)



Once upon a time a man named Frank Stockton wrote a quite short tale destined to become immortal. It was *The Lady or The Tiger?* and which one the hero chose was left to the reader to decide. Robert Young does not avoid such issues in this futuristic version of Stockton's story. Instead, he plunges you right down onto the deadly floor of the . . .

ARENA OF DECISIONS

By ROBERT F. YOUNG

Illustrated by SCHELLING

THE Lady Bri-laithe was famed for her beauty throughout the planet-satrapy of Ingcell, of which her father, Feidlich the Rampant, was satrap. She claimed that on her late mother's side she could trace her genealogy back to Homebase, and that her pedigree was responsible for her pulchritude. However, as the ancient Homebase colonists who had originally settled on Ingcell and intermarried with the natives had been exceedingly few in number, the Lady Bri-laithe's claim was generally doubted.

Among the most recent to doubt it was taxfaxman Jaskar Prell, the Homebase auditor-at-large who had come to Ingcell to audit the satrapy's taxfax-screens for the Erthempire fiscal-period that had begun July 1, 2340 A.D. and ended July 1, 2350 A.D. He doubted it even more after he met the Lady Bri-laithe in person at the banquet which the satrap held in his honor, and more yet when he danced with her afterward in Feidlich's block-long ballroom. "Beauty too rich for use, for Homebase too dear," were the words he spoke to her at the measure's end. "It is not for you, my Lady," he continued a few moments later as they stepped through the self-actuating French doorway that led to the satrap's fabled garden, "to endeavor to validate your claim

that Homebase is the origin of your genealogical line, but for Homebase gratefully to acknowledge the validity of that claim whether it be valid or not."

Ingcell's summer sky was bedecked in all its stellar finery, and a warm wind was sighing up from the south, bringing with it faint but fragrant evidence of the distant *rogain* farms where the bright-blue blooms that had made the planet famous throughout the galaxy and that had given it one of the most enviable economic ratings in the Erthempire were robotically cultivated. The garden was a fairyland of fountains and flowers, of statues and serpentine paths. Beauty such as the Lady Bri-laithe's prospered in such a setting. Lithe yet curvaceous of figure, savage yet classic of face, she was an Ingcellian goddess incarnate. Add to these attributes a pair of large and luminous eyes the hue of golden grain and a wealth of lustrous hair the shade of midnight skies, and it becomes possible to understand why Jaskar Prell, a cynic with regard to all things and to love in particular, was in the process of being consumed by a desire such as he had never dreamed could exist.

THE Lady Bri-laithe seated herself on a marble bench flanked by marble Ingcellian tigers and backgrounded by trel-

lised Ingcellian roses. She arranged the lower section of her blue brocaded gown in such a way as to present her figure at its best and simultaneously to indicate to Prell that he was invited to sit as close to her as protocol permitted. After Prell accepted the invitation, she said, "The proof of my Homebase ancestry lies not in my face, Jaskar Prell, but in my heart. Ever since I first viewed a geographi-tape of the planet and saw the mountains and the seas and the megapolises I have known a nostalgia so acute that Ingcellian landscapes seem to me as vapid and as colorless as week-old wine."

"You would like to go there then, my Lady?"

"Nay—I would like to live there, Jaskar Prell. And I would be living there this very moment, were it not for Homebase's selfishness."

"Our immigration law does not stem from selfishness, my Lady Bri-laithe. Nor does the anti-miscegenation law that walks hand in hand with it. Both arise from the ineluctable fact that Homebase's population figures preclude the naturalization of even one satrapy subject, no matter how competent he—or how comely she—may be. But we do not turn visitors away from our azure door, my Lady, and a subject of your illustrious standing

could obtain, merely for the asking, a passport granting her Homebase residence for a whole year."

The Lady Bri-laithe's right thumb and ring-finger executed a deft and disdainful fillip. "A year indeed! And what would I do afterward, Jaskar Prell? Return to a home-planet that had bored me to distraction before I had even left it? No, Jaskar Prell, if I am to be denied the entire cake, then I want no part of the crumbs of consolation."

At this juncture, a tall young man wearing the silvered dress-whites of a high court-official entered the garden, bringing with him, through the opening and closing French doors, several bars of Ingcell's national waltz. He was Donn Deska, the PR-man to whom Feidlich had entrusted the care and the feeding and the entertaining of the auditor-at-large. He was also, Prell knew, the chief candidate for the Lady Bri-laithe's hand. If Prell hadn't known this, he would have guessed it instantly from the expression that touched the PR-man's ferocious yet somehow sensitive face at the sight of the Lady Bri-laithe sitting virtually in another man's arms.

Halting several feet from the bench, Deska said, "My most abject apologies for this intrusion, Honorable Prell. But in keeping with the wishes of his Eminence,

the satrap of Ingcell, I have prepared an itinerary for the remainder of your stay here and I would like to brief you on it at your earliest convenience."

Prell nodded. "Proceed then, Donn Deska."

FROM the breast pocket of his silvered coat the PR-man withdrew a small notebook. Opening it, he began, "In the morning, Honorable Prell, it will be my privilege to conduct you through the TaxFax Building where, it is to be hoped, you will find Ingcell's taxfax-screens in accord with your eidetic records. Following your examination of the screens, it will next be my privilege to escort you, early in the afternoon, to the Arena of Decisions, where an accused murderer will be on trial for his life and where you may observe our simple system of justice in action. It will next be my privilege to escort you via jettrain to the southern province of Teichid, there to conduct you via mech-safari into the jungle where, on the following day, professional beaters will supply you with as many antelopes as you may wish to gun down. After the hunt, we will return to the capital city, whereupon the itinerary will be both extended and diversified, should you elect to remain in the satrapy in excess of the estimated two days which you requested

of the port authority when you berthed your ship. I trust that these arrangements will be satisfactory, Honorable Prell?"

"They will," Prell said, "after they have been altered in two respects. First, I want the Lady Bri-laithe to accompany us on our visit to the Arena of Decisions and afterward on our excursion to Teichid. Provided, of course," he added, turning toward the lady in question, "this is agreeable to you, my Lady Bri-laithe."

Lush lashes lowered briefly over golden orbs of eyes. "It is most agreeable, Jaskar Prell."

"Second," Prell went on, returning his gaze to Deska, "I will conduct my audit of the taxfax-screens, not tomorrow morning, but tonight." He got to his feet, took the Lady Bri-laithe's hands, and pulled her up beside him. "Hence, my Lady Bri-laithe, with your permission I will now take my leave, in order that the official part of my visit may be consummated forthwith, thereby freeing my mind of business matters, and enabling me to contemplate matters that are closer to my heart."

She squeezed his hands ever so slightly before she freed her own, and he knew that half the battle was won. "Very well, Honorable Prell. I will return to the ballroom and tell the musicians to cease their airs, after which I

will retire for the night, in order that tomorrow can be made to come the faster."

After she disappeared beyond the French doors, Prell turned toward Deska. The PR-man's face had fallen apart, and he was in the midst of putting it back together again. "If you will be so kind as to lead the way, Donn Deska?"

"This way, Honorable Prell. We will take my jetabout."

NEXT to the satrap's palace, which covered six acres of once-fertile land, the Ingcellian Taxfax Building was the largest structure in the satrapy. Computers took up most of the space, but there was still enough left over to afford the taxfax-screen room the dimensions of a starport terminal. The screens were three feet in width, extended from floor to ceiling, and covered every square inch of wall space, save for the areas allotted for the two doorways—the royal one, which Prell and Deska used, and the all-purpose one, which the cybermen used.

There was a cyberman for every six screens. Most of them were bleary-eyed, having just left their beds in response to Deska's summons. All of them, wide-awake and bleary-eyed alike, were white-faced and trembling. This came as no surprise

to Prell, who knew not only the extent of his reputation, but knew as well the wish-fulfillment limerick which some unsung poet laureate had composed not long ago and which had traveled, via galactic grapevine, to every corner of the Erthempire:

*There was a taxfaxman named Prell,
Who could audit exceedingly well.
So fast were his fractions,
The McCoy Interactions
Reduced his red corpuscles to jell.*

Far from resenting the limerick, Prell was proud of being its source of inspiration, and as he proceeded on his tour of examination he took keen delight in the discomfiture of the Ingcellian cybermen, some of whom, no doubt, had been quoting the lines that very evening. Each time he paused before a screen, the cyberman in charge of it punched its fax and figures into clear-cut illumination, and he gave it a single up-and-down glance and went on. No one but a qualified taxfax-man could have made head or tail out of so complex an array of calculations, and no one but a qualified taxfaxman of Prell's caliber could have instantly and eidetically matched each set against the corresponding set that the Ingcellian satrapy had submit-

ted to Homebase Taxfax Headquarters. So accomplished an auditor was he, in fact, that he couldn't miss a discrepancy even if he wanted to, and he almost invariably found one. In the present instance it existed between the calculations on the *rogain*-screen and the corresponding calculations which he had committed to memory. And a handsome discrepancy it was, too—20,000,000 credits, no less. At the 90% regular tax-rate, that came to cr18,000,000, while cr18,000,000 computed at the 1000% backtax rate came to cr18,000,000, leaving Feidlich the Rampant holding the bag to the tune of cr18,018,000,000.

Prell did not doubt in the least that the discrepancy was an accidental one. Usually such mistakes were, as their consequences were so severe that not even the boldest of satraps would risk incurring them. But regardless of whether Feidlich had meant to cheat the Erthempire or not, he was on the spot, and by the time he got off the spot, his kingdom would be in chaos, while he himself would probably end up hanging himself by the neck until dead.

None of which would have made the slightest difference to Prell if it hadn't been for the fact that he was madly in love with the Lady Bri-laithe.

Deska was standing at his el-

bow, nervously shifting from one foot to the other. Prell let him suffer for a little while longer, than said, "I am finished, Donn Deska—we can go now."

"I trust that you have found everything in excellent accord, Honorable Prell?"

"I will submit my report personally to his Eminence upon our return from Teichid. You may so inform him at your earliest convenience."

"Very well, Honorable Prell. Meanwhile, I will transport you to your quarters."

Prell followed him out of the building. He was not particularly surprised when Deska paused beneath an ornate streetlamp and turned to him and blurted, "I feel that I should enlighten you as regards my feelings toward the Lady Bri-laithe, Honorable Prell, before the present situation is allowed to proceed any further."

Prell looked at his rival shrewdly. The PR-man's face was a study in distress, determination, and despair. "All right, Deska—go on."

Deska squared his shoulders and took a deep breath. "I think that it is clear to you," he said presently, "that I am in love with the lady in question. However, I am afraid that it is not clear to you that I am prepared to take whatever steps that prove to be necessary to insure my realizing my love and to insure my

winning hers in return. Therefore, I must warn you, Honorable Prell, that should your present attitude towards her continue I will inform the Homebase authorities via transee-radio that your behavior is not in keeping with the dictates of the Homebase anti-miscegenation law. In other words, I will make certain that you do not realize your intentions towards the Lady Bri-laithe, whether they be honorable or not; and it should be evident to you, Honorable Prell, that in postulating that they are honorable when, under the existent circumstances, they cannot possibly be, I am leaning way over backwards."

"I see," Prell said.

"I am glad you do, Honorable Prell."

Deska produced a small electronic whistle and blew a soundless note on it. A moment later, his jetabout came down from its aerial parking space and opened its doors. The two men were silent all the way to Prell's quarters. "I will pick you up shortly after midday tomorrow," Deska said, as the jetabout came to rest on the guesthouse rooftop, "and transport you to the Arena of Decisions. Is it still your wish that the Lady Bri-laithe accompany us?"

"Naturally," Prell said. "In view of the fact that I invited her, I can hardly wish otherwise."

"No, I suppose you can't." Deska sighed. Then, "Good night, Honorable Prell."

Prell climbed out of the jetabout. "Good night," he said. "Fool!" he added, under his breath.

ARCHITECTURALLY speaking, the Arena of Decisions had much in common with the Colosseum, and the modern materials that constituted its structure simulated to a large extent the quarried stone that had gone into the construction of the original. The arena proper, however, consisted of a blacktopped pit surrounded by a wall of polished zonite. This wall was featureless, save for three electronic doorways. One of these doorways was on one side of the pit, and the other two were on the opposite side, situated about one foot apart. The single doorway, although much wider and higher than the other two, was of the standard variety; while the two lower, narrower ones were special jobs with an overhead bank of five oversized deactivator cells apiece. Like all electronic doors, the doors themselves were transparent, or as nearly transparent as Zwieg-field panels can be.

When Deska, Prell, and the Lady Bri-laithe arrived on the scene shortly after 1:00 P.M. Eastern Ingcellian time, the preponderance of the adult popula-

tion of the capital city was already in attendance, it being the custom of the satrap to declare a national holiday whenever a major criminal was to be tried on his doorstep. In addition to the inhabitants of the capital-city proper, many of the inhabitants of the outlying districts were also present; while for the benefit of the millions who could not attend, a 3V transmitter hung from a huge boom above the center of the pit, taking in everything with its arrogant, multi-faceted eye. A fawning usher escorted Deska, Prell, and the Lady Bri-laithe down a long ramp to the royal box and seated them on the satrap's left, next to the Prime Minister and the Prefect of Police, and while they were waiting for the proceedings to begin the Lady Bri-laithe and Deska alternately explained to Prell how Ingcell's system of justice functioned.

It was based on an ancient Homebase "fable", and made the accused his own judge, jury, and executioner. In order for the accused to qualify for such unique treatment, the crime for which he had been arrested had to be first- or second-degree murder, embezzlement of government funds, or, in time of war, treason; and there had to exist at least a vestige of doubt as to his guilt.

The essence of the system was

embodied in the two smaller doors in the inner arena-wall. Behind one of them, there would be the lady whom the accused had elected to represent his innocence, and behind the other there would be a ferocious Ingcellian tiger. The audience, of course, would be able to see through the doors, but the accused, who would enter the pit in a sealed mobile unit known as the Chief Justice, would view the doors on a small reflector-screen, and as the transparency of a Zweig-field could not survive reflector-transmission, he would not be able to see through them. In addition, the two images would be inverted, the one on his right representing the door on his left, and the one on his left representing the door on his right.

The upper rear section of the CJ was constructed of a special metal that permitted one-way visibility—in this case, into the interior of the unit—while the entire front section was constructed of ersatz metal that amounted to little more than painted cardboard. Below the reflector-screen, there was a small control-board by means of which the accused would operate the machine and on which he would punch out the door of his choice. All five deactivator cells above one of the doors had to be triggered in order for the door to dematerialize, a circumstance

that would enable him to change his mind a maximum of eight times before making his final decision and which would augment the element of suspense, always an important consideration in a public event involving paid admission. If he deactivated the door behind which the lady stood, he would automatically be considered innocent and a de luxe wedding ceremony would be performed on the spot—unless, of course, the lady happened to be his wife (a factor that did not enter into the present case, as the accused was on trial for uxoricide). If, on the other hand, he deactivated the door behind which the tiger stood, he would automatically be considered guilty. Thanks to the CJ, however, he would still stand a chance of saving his life, and if he succeeded in doing so, he would be set free.

"There," the Lady Bri-laithe breathed into Jaskar Prell's right ear, "he's coming into the pit now!"

PRELL looked in the direction she was pointing, noting the hush that had swept over the audience. The CJ had entered the pit via the larger door and was moving across the blacktop toward the two smaller doors. With its pear-shaped cockpit, its head-like scanner, its eye-like antennae, and its short, arm-like

booms, it was grotesquely human in appearance. Its stubby "legs" extended down from a protruding gyro-axle and ended in large, ball-bearing feet, on which it rolled smoothly and soundlessly. Presently it passed beyond the royal box, and Prell was able to see into the cockpit. The accused was a dark-haired man of about thirty, and he was hunched over the control-board, eyes fixed on the reflector-screen before him and fingers hovering over the banks of buttons that governed his destiny.

Prell shifted his attention to the two doors. Through the shimmering panel of the one on the right he saw a tawny-haired Ingcellian maid of about twenty. Through the shimmering panel of the one on the left he saw a huge Ingcellian tiger. As he watched, one of the deactivator cells above the lady's door leaped into sudden brightness.

The audience caught its collective breath.

It caught its collective breath again as two more cells lighted up—this time, above the tiger's door.

The accused had brought the CJ to a halt several yards from the shimmering panels and was frozen in an attitude that suggested intense concentration. But Prell knew that it was indecision, not concentration, that was responsible for the man's



immobility. Indecision—and naked terror.

Abruptly, immobility gave way to spasmodic movement, and another cell lighted up above the lady's door. A moment later, two more lighted up above the tiger's.

For the third time, the audience caught its collective breath.

Yet another cell above the lady's door lighted up. And then, as the accused—apparently unable to endure the excruciating suspense any longer—gambled all on a split-second decision, the final cell above the tiger's door lighted up.

The tiger stalked into the pit, simultaneously materializing on the CJ's reflector-screen. The roar that the beast gave vent to blended with the ecstatic screams of the crowd, and rose skyward on a mighty pillar of sound. Then the tiger charged.

The accused, working franti-

cally on the CJ's operational buttons, managed to roll the clumsy machine far enough to one side to elude the hurtling yellow body and to rip open the animal's flank with one of the CJ's vise-grip "hands". But the tiger charged again so quickly that it was able to rear up and deliver a swiping blow to the CJ's head-

like scanner before the accused could back the machine off. The "head" lolled for a moment, then parted from the neck-like fixture that held it in place, and dropped to the ground.

IMMEDIATELY, the reflector-screen went blank, leaving the accused, to all intents and purposes, blind, and cancelling out what little hope he still had left. His only recourse was to send the CJ moving about the pit on as erratic a course as possible, and this he wasted no time in doing. For a while he was successful in eluding his infuriated nemesis, causing the animal to charge this way and that, but he was only postponing the inevitable, and he must have known it. The end came when the CJ crashed into the zonite wall of the arena and toppled over backwards. The tiger closed in, then, and tore open the machine's vulnerable "chest" with a single, frightful blow, and the accused, trapped in the interior, hardly had time to utter a single anguished scream before it was all over.

In the satrap's seat, Feidlich the Rampant was smiling the self-satisfied smile of a ruler who had decreed justice and seen it meted out. "Ineluctable are the laws of Ingcell," he proclaimed above the raucous cheers of the multitude, his two chins wagging and his face a study in fe-

rocity gone to fat. "Nowhere in the Erthempire is justice dispensed thus efficiently and thus irrevocably." He looked past the faces of the Prefect of Police, the Prime Minister, and the Lady Bri-laithe and caught Prell's eye. "Is this not true, Honorable auditor-at-large?"

"It is indeed true, your Eminence," Prell answered. "You are to be complimented on the simplicity and the directness of your judiciary procedure."

A short while later, descending one of the outer ramps to the street with the Lady Bri-laithe leaning on his arm, he asked, "Does your father, my Lady, know beforehand which of the doors lead to the tiger and which to the lady?"

She nodded. "He does indeed, Jaskar Prell. It is he who does the deciding."

"I see," Prell said. He was thoughtful for a moment; then, after making sure that Donn Deska was far enough down the ramp to be out of earshot, "Are visitors to Ingcell who commit major crimes subject to the Ingcellian system of justice?" he asked. "I know of course, my Lady," he went on, "that diplomatic immunity is not honored here any more than it is on the other Erthempire planets; but I cannot help wondering whether a visitor who committed a major crime would be subjected to so

severe an ordeal as a trial in the Arena of Decisions."

"Specifically, you are wondering whether you yourself would be thus subjected were you to commit such a crime—is that not so, Jaskar Prell?"

"Yes, my Lady, that is so."

"You would be beyond a doubt—even though there has been no precedent."

"And would I be allowed to choose any lady I wished, to represent my innocence and afterward, should I be proven not guilty, to be my bride?"

"Yes," Honorable Prell.

"Any lady in the land?"

"Any lady in the land."

"H'm'm," said Jaskar Prell.

THE jettrain trip to Teichid was uneventful save for one incident. Shortly before the train passed through the *rogain*-farm region, a trainman entered the royal compartment, withdrew three oxygen masks from a sack hanging at his side, and gave one apiece to Deska, Prell, and the Lady Bri-laithe. "I would advise all of you," he said, "to put them on now and to keep them on till *rogain* country is far behind us. It's that season, you know, and one cannot always trust the efficiency of air-conditioning units."

After the man left, Prell turned to Deska, who was sitting between him and the Lady Bri-

laithe on the richly upholstered seat. "To what season did he refer, Donn Deska?"

"To the *rogain* season, of course," Deska answered. "The blooms are at full maturity now, and all Ingcellians must avoid over-exposure to their scent. Although your Homebase origin in all probability makes you immune, it will still be to your best interests to take the standard precaution."

"Precaution against what?" Prell asked.

"That, I cannot tell you, Honorable Prell. There are some things which one race of people can never, in all fairness to themselves, reveal to another race of people."

Prell donned his mask and said no more, although the device was equipped with a diaphragm for speaking. Deska's words had stirred the ashes of a tiny fire of forgotten knowledge in his mind, and it annoyed him no end that his eidetic prowess should be confined to taxfax to the extent that he couldn't bring the ashes back to life. That they had to do with the *rogain* blooms, he had no doubt; but precisely what their connection was he could not determine without knowing the forgotten data which they represented.

At length, he forsook the ashes and went on to a different fire. This one was a live one, and

burning more and more brightly with each passing moment. He fed it more fuel, closely watching the flames for any sign of flickering. There was none. He warmed his hands over the blaze, rejoicing. But he knew that before he could launch the plan that the fire symbolized he would need the Lady Bri-laithe's blessing.

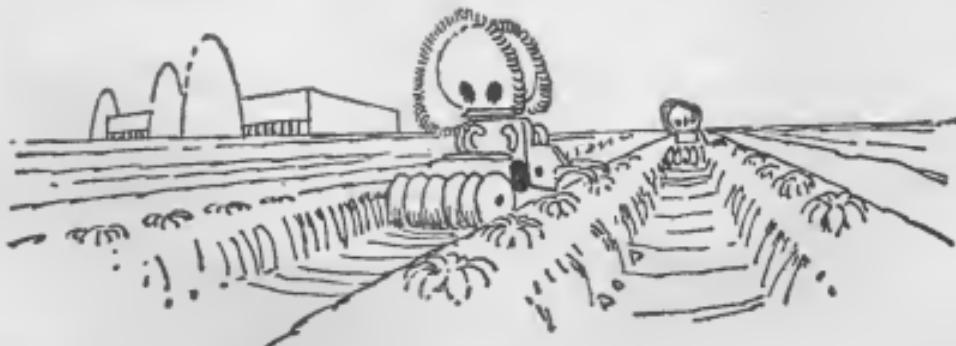
He sought her out that night after the mech-safari which Donn Deska had engaged transported the trio deep into the Teichid jungle and unfolded itself into a modernistic and luxurious camp surrounded by a force-field bomba and supplied with running water, seven varieties of superlative mech-meals, and enough champagne for an army. Donn Deska had retired early, and at first Prell thought that the Lady Bri-laithe had gone to bed also, as only the faintest of lights shone through the windows of her tent. Such did not prove to be the case, however. "Enter, Jaskar Prell," she said, opening wide her plasti-

panel door and stepping to one side. "You will have a midnight drink with me?"

"Of course," Prell said.

SHE filled two iridescent glasses, placed one of them in his hand. They drank, tacitly toasting each other in the roseate radiance of the turned-down tent-light. She was wearing a diaphanous peignoir that gave tantalizing glimpses of the black-mesh nightgown and the glowing white skin it pretended to conceal. A hammering began in Prell's temples; a tightness settled in his chest. Yes, he had to have her, and he had to have her at all costs. There wasn't a woman in the entire Erthempire who could compare to her, or at least none that he had ever known, and he had known many.

"My Lady Bri-laithe," he began, "you told me last night that it is your fondest dream to live on Homebase. To what lengths are you willing to go to make that dream come true?"



"Be more specific, Jaskar Prell."

"Will you, as a starter, consent to marry me?"

Flames flickered in her luminous eyes, then went out. "But you know as well as I do, Jaskar Prell, that the same laws that deny me the privilege of becoming a Homebase citizen also deny me the privilege of becoming your bride."

"Laws are made to be circumvented, my Lady Bri-laithe."

The flames came back into her eyes, and stayed there. "Go on, Jaskar Prell."

"I can circumvent the anti-miscegenation law quite easily, because, like all Erthempire laws, it is invalid when it comes in conflict with the administration of local justice. And once I have circumvented the anti-miscegenation law, the naturalization law will no longer apply in your case, because in the process of becoming my wife you will simultaneously have become a Homebase citizen. But before I set about accomplishing this, my Lady Bri-laithe, I must have your assurance that you will approve of the steps I will have to take." Briefly, he told her what those steps were. "Do I have that assurance, my Lady?"

She hesitated. "Look," Prell went on, pressing his advantage with the adroitness gleaned from a thousand taxfax interviews,

"you know and I know that as long as you remain on Ingcell you will never—in the eyes of the Erthempire at least—be anything more than a fifth-rate princess. But as a Homebase citizen and the wife of a taxfaxman you will enjoy the status you deserve. On Homebase, my Lady, you will be a true princess, and in addition to the public adulation which will be yours as a matter of course, you will be accorded respect of a more practical nature. Million-crediteers will curry your favor, cartel-chiefs will fawn at your feet; the First Lady and the First Gentleman of the Homebase Royal Family will fete you at the Ivory Palace, and the commodores of commerce will bring you gifts of mink and ermine and frankincense and myrrh. I ask you again, then, my Lady Bri-laithe—do I have your assurance that you will approve of the steps that I need to take?"

She moved close to him, and the fragrance of her rose round him in Paphian waves. The last words he remembered hearing for hours afterward were, "Yes, Jaskar Prell, you do."

The next morning at the hunt, the Lady Bri-laithe shot first, killing three antelopes. Donn Deska shot next, killing four. Jaskar Prell shot last. He killed five antelopes, and afterward he killed Donn Deska. He shot him through the back of the head

when none of the safari personnel was looking, and from a distance of fifty paces. The only eyewitness was the Lady Bri-laithe.

AS Jaskar Prell had known he would, Feidlich the Rampant paid a visit to the accused on the eve of the trial. "Well, Honorable Prell," said the satrap, "it appears that in the very near future I am either going to have a son-in-law to cherish or the remnants of a corpse to ship back to Homebase. You must love my daughter very much to risk the claws of the tiger in order to make her your bride."

"Yes, your Eminence," Prell said, "I do love your daughter very much. But not enough to risk the claws of the tiger in order to make her my bride."

Feidlich frowned. "Then why, pray, are you doing so? It is clear that you deliberately murdered Donn Deska in such a way as to leave a vestige of doubt as to your guilt, thereby making yourself liable to trial in the Arena of Decisions."

"I am not risking the claws of the tiger, your Eminence, for the simple reason that I do not need to risk them. You are going to reveal to me behind which door the tiger will be, and to show my gratitude for this unprecedented act of mercy on your part, I in turn am not going to reveal to

Homebase Taxfax Headquarters that your *rogain* taxfax-screen shows an 18,000,000 credit tax-deficit and that as a result you owe the Erthempire some 18,018,000,000 credits in back-taxes."

Feidlich's face turned green, then blue, then white. "But that cannot be, Honorable Prell! I employ the best taxfax experts in the satrapy!"

"Even the experts are not always infallible, your Eminence, but their fallibility does not qualify you for forgiveness—a fact of life which I am sure you are aware of. That which is yours is the Erthempire's, and that which is the Erthempire's is its own. I have already made out my report," Prell went on, watching the satrap's face closely, "and have deposited it in one of Ingcell's most inviolate safety-deposit vaults, along with written instructions, appended with my taxfaxman's seal, that it be sent to Homebase immediately should I be rendered incapable of delivering it myself."

Only Feidlich's eyes betrayed him. They transmuted from brown to gold, and then back to brown again. "I must compliment you, Honorable Prell—you play your cards par excellence. The tiger will be behind the door on your left, the Lady Bri-laithe, behind the door on your right."

"Thank you, your Eminence."

Prell grinned at the black walls of his cell after Feidlich departed. If Deska had been a fool, the satrap was a bigger one. And, like all fools, he must be made to pay as great a price as possible for his fooldom.

IT was not everyday that the citizens of Ingcell had the opportunity to see a taxfaxman on the spot. Indeed, it was a satisfaction that hitherto had been denied them altogether. Consequently, every adult Ingcellian who could get to the capital city on the day of Prell's trial, got there, and the Arena of Decisions was packed as it had never been packed before.

Prell knew that he would be "performing" before a capacity crowd even before he guided the repaired CJ through the Doorway of the Accused and into the pit. If he had not known, the megadecibel roar that greeted the machine's appearance would have apprised him of the fact.

The arena attendants had taught him how to manipulate the CJ, and he had been permitted to practice all that morning. Hence, he had not the slightest trouble in picking up the two doorways on the reflector-screen and in guiding the CJ across the pit. Several yards from his dual destination, he brought the machine to a stop and listened to the silence that had settled over

the spectators. He smiled grimly. He would give them the suspense they had paid their credits to experience, but not the satisfaction. Instead of rejoicing over his mangled body as they aspired to do, they would be dancing at his wedding.

He looked at the two image-doors on the reflector-screen. Feidlich had said that the Lady Bri-laithe would be behind the door on Prell's right, which, of course, owing to the picture's inversion, corresponded to the image-door on Prell's left. But since Feidlich, knowing even better than Prell did that a satrap had the right to impound the contents of every safety-deposit vault in his satrapy any time he wanted to, had lied, the Lady Bri-laithe was really behind the door on Prell's left, which meant that he had to light up the cells on the image-door on his right in order to prove himself innocent. He smiled again. By lying, Feidlich had merely made his future son-in-law's work that much easier.

But wait a minute. Maybe the satrap, in saying "the door on your right", had been referring to the image-door on Prell's right.

The taxfaxman began to sweat.

That the satrap had lied in either case, there could be no doubt. But in lying, the man

might inadvertently have told the truth—if the door which he had meant was the image-door.

The odds had it, however, that Feidlich had meant the real door. Prell took the odds, and bet his life.

HE activated a cell over the image-door on his left, listened to the audience's collective gasp. He activated another cell over the same door. Another, and another. The crowd grew suddenly silent. Did the silence stem from anticipation or disappointment? Did it mean that the tiger was beyond the door, or the Lady Bri-laithe?

There was no way for Prell to know.

Cheeks awash with cold sweat, he activated three of the cells over the image-door on his right. Another one. The silence of the crowd was so acute now that the hoarse sound of his own breathing hurt his eardrums.

His forefinger moved to the final deactivator button of the real door on his left. Hovered over it.

For the first time in his life, he searched his soul.

Had he been right in turning the old drygoods peddler on Jonakar over to the tax troopers and letting them stomp the truth out of him?

Had he been right in feathering his nest at the expense of the

plenipotentiary from Hemling and afterward turning the man in on another tax-evasion charge?

Had he been right in accepting four female centaurs from the satrap of Besancon in payment for the satrapy's tax deficit and in selling them afterward at a fabulous profit to New Hialeah Enterprises?

Had he been right in murdering Donn Deska in order that he might marry the Lady Bri-laithe and take her back to Homebase with him?

Was he, now that he was confronted with the necessity of making a life-and-death decision, belatedly developing a conscience?

Impossible! Consciences were for fools, and whatever else he might be, Jaskar Prell was not a fool.

He brought his finger down on the deactivator-button.

The image-door on his right lighted up, the Lady Bri-laithe materialized on the reflector-screen, and he knew that he had won.

FEIDLICH the Rampant looked positively ill when he congratulated Prell after the wedding ceremony. "I would like to have a word with you alone, your Eminence," Prell said.

"Very well, Honorable Prell. But please remember that you

are my son-in-law now, and that if you bring dishonor down upon my head you will bring it down upon your own also . . . I will be in my chambers one hour hence."

Feidlich was as good as his word, and an hour later Prell found him seated behind his personal desk in the palace library. The taxfaxman came straight to the point. "In exchange for my silence and in retribution for your treachery, your Eminence," he said, "I want one large payload of Ingcell's most precious commodity to take back to Homebase with me."

"But that would be *rogain*, Honorable Prell," the satrap objected, "and—"

"And *rogain* blooms cannot be transported over interstellar distances except in special refrigerator-ships—is that what you're going to tell me? Well for your information, your Eminence, I have one of the new taxfax ships at my disposal, and like all the new ships it is equipped with a commodious refrigerator-hold. You would be surprised, my dear Feidlich, at the variety of produce the Erthempire accepts as payment for backtaxes, and you would be surprised as well at the variety of produce taxfaxmen accept as payment for keeping their mouths shut."

But *rogain*, Honorable Prell. You—"

"A payload of *rogain* blooms

will net me a modest fortune on the Homebase market, so let us have no more 'buts'. You will see to it that the blooms are placed in the hold at once. The Lady Bri-laithe and I are leaving for Homebase this evening."

Feidlich's face seemed less fat than ferocious now, and flecks of gold had come into his brown eyes. "Very well, Honorable Prell," he said. "You leave me no choice."

He had the blooms flown in by jetfreight, and that evening he and the upper-echelon court-officials came to the starport to see Prell and the Lady Bri-laithe off. The couple waved good by as the gantry backed away, and afterward Prell closed and sealed the locks, and turned on the automatics. Soon, the taxfax ship was spaceborne.

In the lounge, the Lady Bri-laithe took several deep breaths, and turned puzzledly to Prell. "I must be suffering from olfactory hallucinations," she said. "I could swear that I am smelling *rogain* blooms."

"You are smelling them, my Lady. Your father lied to me about the doors, so I exacted retribution from him in the form of Ingcell's famous flowers. The refrigerator-hold is filled with them, and the ventilation system carries their fragrance throughout the ship."

THE Lady Bri-laithe's face had gone white. "You fool!" she screamed. "Deactivate the system at once!"

"I cannot, my Lady Bri-laithe. Only the automatics can do that."

"Then turn back to Ingcell before it's too late!"

Anger was building up in Prell, and it was with difficulty that he controlled himself. "Come, my Lady Bri-laithe," he said, "this is no way for a bride to behave on her honeymoon. Surely upon such an occasion you can put so minor a matter as a fancied allergy to *rogain* from your mind."

He moved closer to her and tried to take her in his arms. To his consternation, she fled from the lounge and ran down the companion-ramp toward their cabin. He ran after her, arriving

at the cabin door just in time to have it slammed in his face. Furious, he tried the knob. When it did not turn, he began pounding on the panels. Finally he moved back several paces, lunged forward, and struck the door with his right shoulder. Just as the lock broke, sending him sprawling into the cabin, the ashes of the forgotten *rogain* data came to life in his mind and words flamed briefly on his mental retina:

ROGAIN: a unique species of wolfsbane which flourishes on Ingcell and which is cultivated to commercial advantage by the natives but avoided by them personally for esoteric reasons that date far back into their folklore.

With the tiger, Jaskar Prell would have stood a chance. But he had none at all with the tigress.

THE END



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SUNBURST

By PHYLLIS
GOTLIEB

First of Three Parts

Illustrated by
SCHELLING



IT was Shandy Johnson's thirteenth birthday, and she had celebrated by treating herself to a vanilla cone and a licorice stick. Alternately blackening her tongue with one and whitening it with the other, she was about to step up on the curb at Tenth and Main, when a boy who had been holding up the lamppost on the corner favored her with a long low whistle.

She was startled; first looked back to see if he meant somebody else. There was no-one there. Then she glanced into the plate-glass window of Fitch's Joint to see if she had turned within the last moment into something rich and strange; she hadn't. She was still a very tall cranelike girl, rather sallow, with a narrow torso in navy sweatshirt and long bluejean legs like articulated stovepipes. A high forehead and pointed chin gave her face the look of a brown egg poised on the small end, and her long crinkly black hair was tied in a ponytail with a shoelace.

She sniffed and rubbed her nose to make sure it at least was still on the straight and narrow, then took a fast hard look at the young man.

If it were possible, she would have thought he had escaped from the Dump. He had a boxer-crouching bullethead set on a bull neck, thick arms, and a barrel chest tapering into short legs

and small feet. But he was so obviously an extreme of his type she began to wonder if he hadn't escaped from a zoo. He had a long-lipped chimp mouth, and best of all, one fantastic black eyebrow curling around his eyes and across the bridge of his nose. All he needed was psi.

He gave her an innocent cheerful grin; she replied with a level surly glare and went past him into Fitch's Joint, cramming the stuff in her mouth and wiping her hands on her pants.

"Hey, Fitso, who's the monk on the lamppost?"

Fitch put down the glass he was polishing and leaned back to get the view. He jerked back fast. "Hell, it's the Dumper's peeper!"

So he did have the psi. She flashed her teeth. "I thought he didn't look kosher."

He regarded her curiously. "How come you didn't know him yourself?"

"I keep out of the way." She admired her black tongue in the mirror. "And I got spies."

Fitch picked up the glass again, but his hands trembled. "You better scram through the back."

"I don't think he wants you, Fitso."

"If he's read you he don't need nothing else. Listen, Shandy—" pursing his rosebud mouth, he rummaged in the cash drawer and tossed her a crumpled bill,

"—get on a bus and hole up in the east end."

"Me? I don't need this! Like you say, if he's read me—"

"Shut up" He snapped his flowered armbands and added through his teeth, "Just get out!"

He turned his back on her and she frowned once at his bald head and wedged the bill in her tight side pocket. She took one more glance through the window. The champ was beginning to move, and she scuttled out the back door without waiting to see if the lamppost fell over.

She threaded her way among garbage cans, ran down the trucking lane, and came out on Tenth. He would know where she was, but his pk range was small; she could keep up a strong, if awkward, loping run and lead him by the nose. Not on a main street, though. Any CP who was about would think she had swiped something, so she settled into a gentle ostrich-trot. She looked back once, swiftly; he had not yet come round the corner, and was probably still talking to Fitch.

THE late afternoon sun was slanting as she rose into the lovely mellow light on the rooftop of Pyper's Drygoods, crouching and silent. Douggy Pyper was there, feeding the pigeons; they were cooing and flapping

about his thin freckled neck and he did not hear her.

She said in a low voice, "It's Shandy. Jason Hemmer's after me. You want to take a look down?"

He was at least half of the spy system she had so impressed Fitch with. For him, as well as herself, espionage was the natural function of a child in an adult world. He nodded, barely turning, and went over to the parapet, a pigeon still clinging to his shoulder. "Nobody there yet," he announced, and went back to his task.

She was confused. Hemmer should have known where she was. She crouched for a few moments in the shadow of the pigeon-cote, then rose and slipped quickly over to the next rooftop, past chimneys, TV aerials, and skylights like great quartz crystals.

After three more stores there was no place to go. She sat down in the dirty corner of the roof, circling her arms round her sharp knees and rubbing knobs of licorice off her teeth with her tongue. Let him come and get her, dirty spy.

Jason Hemmer was the only psi outside the Dump; probably the only free one in the world. The forty-seven psychopaths penned in the Dump possessed more personal powers than had ever been known to Mankind; he

paid a price for his freedom by scouting the city for new psis as they were born, or more likely, as their powers developed during childhood. No parent could hide a child from Jason Hemmer, and no-one in Sorrel Park considered him a lovable character.

Shandy wriggled in discomfort on bits of gravel and slivered brick. She was sure if she edged her eyes ever so narrowly over the parapet he would be on the sidewalk among the threading people, facing up with his cockeyed grin. I pspy. Her lip curled. *That for you, she spat at the invisible enemy.*

SHED got up on her knees and poked her head defiantly over the rim, intending to stick her tongue out at him, and pulled back in surprise. He was not yet in the street. Now there was something funny here. He was a telepath, he was homing on her . . . or was he only playing a trick to scare her on an idle afternoon? But Jason Hemmer was not an idler in the street. He was as anxious to avoid the civilians who despised him for a baby-snatcher as he was to keep out of the way of the CivilPolice, who loathed him as an arm of the martial law.

Her knees were too sensitive to rest on for long, and she picked herself up and looked over the

rooftops, but there was no-one in sight but Douggy. Arms akimbo, she surveyed the narrow horizon. It was a dispiriting view, limited by barbed-wire ramparts, reaching into the sky only with grime and smoke.

America's "Open-The-Door-In Eighty-Four" policy had had a noble sound overseas, and a year of quota-free immigration had swelled Sorrel Park, as well as many other small towns. But ten years later all doors to Sorrel Park were closed. The town stopped in mid-growth. Its second generation had not learned the new ways of America, because new ways did not filter through barbed-wire, or prosper in an almost non-existent economy. Outgoing mail was censored, and little of the promised money made its way back to families in Europe. Fifteen thousand men and women who had brought determination and industriousness lost heart, and the town withered and shrank back on itself. A generation had been cheated; with twisted spirits they began to cheat in return.

For Shandy, it was what she had always known—but not necessarily home. She accepted and despised it only as she accepted and despised the existence of Jason Hemmer. She knelt at the roof-edge and looked down into the street again. This time she saw him.

HE was trotting round a corner on the opposite side of the street, trying to look unconcerned, and a failure at subterfuge in his new workshirt and clean jeans. He stopped uncertainly, looking this way and that, and people on the sidewalk stepped around him, frowning, but he seemed not to notice them. He crossed the street at a slow run, lumbering, but with a kind of heavy grace, like Neanderthal at his best. She suppressed a flicker of admiration and narrowed her eyes; he fetched up on the sidewalk below her, looked both ways once more, and scratched his head.

Evidently he didn't trust his telepathy: he tapped a passing woman on the shoulder. She blinked at him once, bridled, and recoiled. Then she opened her mouth and began to yell, "I don't know and I don't—" Two or three men rang up as she got a good grip on a big purse and swung her arm back, and Shandy, watching from only a few yards up, bit her knuckles to keep from laughing aloud.

Jason Hemmer had cringed like a boxer warding off a blow. After a frozen moment he relaxed and straightened, and moved quietly back against the wall. The men and the woman, dumbfounded, began looking about wildly. Somehow he seemed to have disappeared.

"Up to his damn tricks," one of the men snarled. "Did he hurt you, lady?" But the woman merely sniffed, shook her fist at the empty air, and went her way.

The men melted, and Jason Hemmer moved out, and stood silent on the pavement. Shandy could have spat on his head.

But she no longer wanted to. A cold knot of uneasiness was tightening itself in her belly: she should not have been able to see him once he had decided to disappear. There was something strange going on.

If the CPs had been after her, she would have spent her last breath escaping them. Juvenile Detention up on the top floor of the County Jail was a sickening prospect. She did not want to be caught by the MPs either. But she had no psi. Once nabbed by Jason Hemmer, she would only have been measured, psyched, rorschached, and given a Prognostic Index, in itself a safeguard against the Dump. And in the end, she would have learned something.

But now she sensed more at stake than a game of cat-and-mouse with a little temporary inconvenience at the end of it. Sure of the outcome, before, she had been almost eager to match wits with the Dumper's peeper. Now she could wait.

She watched, fascinated, as he shrugged, scuffed his thick shoes

on the sidewalk, jammed his hands in his pockets, and shambled down the street.

She relaxed. He knew where she lived. She would give him plenty of time to go there and stir up a hornet's nest with Ma Slippec. It was some comfort that nobody connected with the MPs was likely to give anybody up to the CPs. She rose and crossed the roofs again, prepared for a serious discussion with Douggy Pyper on the depredations of the pip.

SHE walked home slowly in the soft evening light; lamps were coming on. She had no intention of holding up in the east end. Fitch was a scared little man and she had better uses for his money.

When she came within a block of Slippec's Cigarstore she knew she had gone wrong somewhere. There was a stir about the place with plenty of yelling and screaming. Reason told her to jump on the next bus, but she went ahead; seeing the dark-blue CP uniforms milling around she began to run.

They were dragging a scratching, screeching ragbag out of the store. It was Ma Slippec, a gaunt woman with scraggy black hair, in a torn dress and dirty shawl, and she was thrashing furiously. Her son Karel and her daughter-in-law Rosie were pulling at her

from behind, and the civvies knocked their arms down with billies.

"Lemme go, ya fat heads!" she bawled. Crack! went the billy on the side of her jaw, and she subsided in howling and gibberish. From far back came the sound of heavy instruments crumpling the still in the backyard bombshelter.

Thirty years earlier, the blow-up of the thermonuclear plant had made the city a military secret; twenty-two years after that, when restrictions were gradually being lifted, a second and more terrible explosion had killed freedom for good. Shandy had known neither of the explosions, and she had never lost her sense of freedom. After a childhood spent dodging the heavy-handed Slippecs, she still had no fear of violence, and no idea how to stop it; she ran in blindly angry.

A thick hand closed around her arm and pulled. She twisted, striking out, and found herself facing Jason Hemmer.

"Damn you, you did all this!" She knew this was untrue even as she said it, kicking out in blind fury. "Let me go!"

"You nut!" He pulled her down the street and into a dark doorway. "Whan to get your jaw bust too?"

She whispered, close to tears, "There're hurting her!—"

"She'll be back in a week, all wired up. Civvies gotta have their fun."

She shivered. He poked his head out for an instant. "They got her in the wagon. Come on!"

"I got stuff in there, upstairs—" she pulled back. "Clothes and—and books—"

He looked at her. "You wanna go ask them nicely? Never mind, I'll get it for you. Get going!" He yanked her down the street and into a deserted alley. "Now that stuff," he said. "Where?"

He had let her go, and she rubbed her arm, still trembling with outrage. "Read me and see!"

"Go without!"

"All right!" She breathed deeply. "Small back room, upstairs."

He closed his eyes. "Yeah, they got somebody tearing up the mattress."

"Nothing there. Orange crate by the bed: two pair socks, two nightgowns, pants," she reddened in the dark, "—jeans, jersey, khaki duffel . . ."

"Okay, busterboy, now you see 'em, now you don't—"

WHUCK! The khaki duffel looped its drawstring around his wrist, swinging with weight. He opened the neck: pouf! pouf! Two ragged cotton nightgowns puffed and bloomed in the air above him; he held out the bag

and they went in. Pop, pop, two pairs rolled-up socks, pants, etc.

"That all?"

"Yes—gimme!"

"Not yet. I had enough goose-chase with you. Cote on!" He pushed at her. "Git the lead out. You nearly got us both beat up already."

"Not you," she said bitterly.

"Me? Listen, a guy throws a brick at me, I can keep it off. Two, three, maybe. Ten guys and ten bricks, I get seven bricks." He laughed shortly. "If I could do any better I might be in the Dump instead of helping MPs shove other guys there. You had supper?"

They had stopped in front of Jake's Eat-It-And-Beat-It, and she hesitated. She had been expecting supper at home, but it didn't look as if she'd get it. "No," she said at last. She was hungry enough, though what she had seen back there had taken the edge off her appetite.

As he pushed the door open she said, "Will they serve you?"

"Sure, they'll think I'm a gooky red-haired guy with a big nose and an Adam's apple. You'll see."

She had eaten in plenty of greasy spoons before, including this one, but now the rank stale odors and slopped counters made her long for Fitch, with his crackling clean white shirt and mauve armbands with roses.

They slid into a booth and the potbellied counterman came over, wiping his wet hands on a filthy apron.

"Hiya, Shandy. What's yours, Red?"

"Why don't I?"

"Why don't you what?"

"See you as a gooky red-haired guy with a big nose and an Adam's apple."

He shoved the last of the pie in his mouth and worked his strong jaws around it like a grazing animal; and was silent.

She said crossly, "All right, keep it a secret. At least tell me what you want me for."

"I don't know."

"You don't know! That's a lie!"

He ignored the insult. "I don't decide any of these things. They tell me, 'Jason, go get Blank.' So I get Blank."

She looked hard at him. His brown eyes were lazy and amused. Hunger over, she had begun to be aware of herself again. The booth, built to encourage fast turnover, cramped her ungainly limbs. When she thought she was leading him astray, she had felt perfectly competent and self-assured. Now, under the eye of the enemy, she was odds and angles, a square out of Flatland, and dirty, sweaty and defeated besides. She tried hard to control her temper,

waiting till he had fillipped a cigarette out of a pack and stuck it in the corner of his mouth, and then she said, "Please give me back my stuff now."

"Not yet." One eye crimped against the smoke, he bent down and lifted the duffel. "Whatcha got in here, rocks?" He reached in a hand and pulled out a book. "Hah! The Web and the Rock!" He flipped open the cover. "Sorrel Park Public Library—no card . . . why were you so anxious to have me get out *this*?"

She said desperately, "If the CPs had found it they could have pulled me in for theft."

"Good enough reason, I guess—but fifteen cents would have got you a card."

"And my name on somebody's register."

He had pulled out an even heavier volume. "My God! Rorschach's Test, Volume I, Basic Processes . . . but this must belong to—" he turned up the flyleaf, "—yeah." He looked up and shook his head. "You never went to school."

"No."

"Jee-z, I'd hate to have to test you." She giggled. He asked with interest, "How'd you make out with it?"

"Like Huck Finn'd say, it was interesting, but tough. I got through it."

"How'd you get hold of it?"

"He was giving a lecture at the

Y—you know, telling them what was being done for the kids? So I snuck it out of his briefcase when he was answering questions. But I haven't touched his notes and markers. Was he mad?"

"Mad!" He snorted. "But how could you get away with it? There was only grownups supposed to be there."

It was her turn to snort. "Listen, when I was six years old I used to carry bottles from Ma Slippec's in a doll carriage four-five times a day. Nobody ever asked me: whatcha got in there, little girl? Nobody ever asked me why I wasn't in school, CPs MPs, truant officers."

He said seriously, "I can understand that."

"I can't. I know I'm bright—what else is different about me besides this?" she indicated her stringbean proportions.

"You sure you're bright, now?" He was grinning.

"Why?"

"Fitch gave you some money."

She hesitated. "Yes. What's that got to do with it?"

"How much?"

"If you don't know, it's none of your business."

"I read him, so I know. Now you tell me how much."

She hadn't taken time to examine the bill, and named the highest reasonable figure. "Five."

"No, ma'am. Twenty dollars."

"You're nuts!"

His single brow rose to an even more laughable shape. "Didn't you even look at it?"

EXASPERATED, she hooked a forefinger in her pocket, dug out the bill, and spread it carefully on a clean spot among the dirty dishes. It was a twenty. She looked at him suspiciously. "Did you have anything to do with this?"

"I haven't any reason to do anything of that kind, Shandy."

She had to take him at his word. "Wow, this is more than all the money I ever had added up together."

"Why'd he give it to you?"

"What are you talking about?" She drew her dark brows together. "To help me out."

"Kind of sudden, giving you a twenty right away just because you saw me—" his grin broadened "—holding up the lamp-post."

Her heart beat faster. "So what?"

"How'd I get to see you, when you'd been practically the invisible girl around here, these thirteen years?"

She got the drift at last. "I don't believe you," she whispered.

"How come your Ma Slippec got picked up by the CPs just two hours later?"

The words rose to her lips: you want to smear everybody with the dirt you deal in. But she knew it wasn't so. She glanced up and saw Jake picking his teeth and watching them impatiently. They were the only customers in the hiatus between supper and after-movie, and he was anxious for them, having eaten, to Beat-It so he could duck out and hoist a couple from a jug of Ma Slippec's corn. He was a dirty man, but not a bad one. Evil in a clean white shirt had just never occurred to her before. Not Fitch.

"So why did he give you the twenty?"

"For a band-aid on his conscience."

"Right."

She looked down and played with crumbs. Jason asked suddenly, "He ever dandle you on his knee, or anything like that?"

"No . . . he did clip me on the ear once for busting one of his bottles, but I never held it against him."

"So he's no loss."

"But why would he do a thing like that?"

He drew in deeply on his cigarette. "The government is thinking of opening up Sorrel Park."

She digested this for a moment, but was too tired to care what it might mean to her. "What will they do about the Dump?"

"That's what they haven't figured out yet."

"I haven't heard this around."

"Fitch did. I guess he's got contacts."

I got spies, she had told Fitch. She guessed it had meant more than a kid's game to him.

"Anyway, he's been running a blind pig eight or nine years, and it was okay as long as the Sore was closed up; nobody cared too much. People wanted the stuff, and fancy goods weren't coming in. The police have gone easy on bootlegging and petty crime as long as it didn't reflect on the rest of the state, or the country. People on the outside didn't know about it. But once the Sore is open we gotta clean up. That's why the CPs are busting up the stills."

"And Fitch?"

"Like I say, he's been running a blind pig. He knows he'll have to give it up, but he doesn't want to go to jail over it. He wants to be all ready for a nice fresh start. He figured he'd strike a good bargain with the CPs and the MPs: Ma Slippec to them, you to us. Buttering the bread on both sides."

"But I'm not valuable," said Shandy. "Not from his point of view. I have no psi."

"He said you were different," Jason said. "He didn't know why, but that it might be worth our while to find out."

SHANDY picked up the bill and folded it into a wad.

"So you see that money's kind of dirty."

"I never did anything dirty to get it." She shoved the bill down where she hoped to have a cleavage one day, but it only crackled down her washboaad chest and lodged in a fold of her jersey.

He had recoiled a little, but he only said quietly, "I wasn't trying to take it away from you . . . what I want to know, Shandy, is—if you're so bright, why you didn't figure Fitch."

She thought fleetingly, why is he willing to sit here and talk like this, when it's getting so late? He wouldn't have understood the answer she had for his question: Fitch had been an unemotionally accepted part of her life for ten years, and she had thought she knew him very well, without ever putting the question to herself. "I can't read minds, Jason."

His eyes clouded. "Well, maybe I'll tell you something now. I can't read yours."

She sat very still. "Not at all?"

"No. You're an Impervious."

"Is that—is that what's different about me?" It explained a lot. She felt a new, wild excitement.

"Oh, I think Fitch's story was probably hogwash. But this is one genuine thing. If there's anything else," he added cheerfully, "We'll find it out."

Oh, no you won't, Jason Hemmer! My plans have changed!

He picked up the check without looking at it, and dug in his pocket. "You know, you don't realize how hard it is for me to talk to a person I can't read. It's a nice change, though. Talk about change," he poked around in his palmful of coins, "I hope we don't have to use that money of yours."

"You can wash dishes!"

He laughed. "You think they really get washed here? Listen," he turned serious, "Maybe you know now why you managed to stay inconspicuous."

"Fitch greased a few palms, saving me up for now?"

"Ah, now you're getting nasty-minded, and I like you better the other way. Save the crack! No—Fitch isn't that complicated. Most normal people have latent or vestigial psi. It's a lot stronger in babies and little kids, but it's a kind of clumsy and inarticulate thing and it withers away when better methods of communication develop. But adults can still feel the presence of people they can't see, most of the time unconsciously, or nobody could ever hide. With you it's different. Anybody who notices you has to practically tread on your toes first. I even have to concentrate hard before I can see you in anybody else's mind. You're the first complete Imper I've ever come

across. That's why I whistled."

"Is that right?"

"Yeah, that's right." He had that cockeyed grin, now, that she had expected, looking over the parapet. "Grow up a little, Shandy. Maybe I'll whistle again."

"Don't wait for me!" she snapped. As he stood up, still smiling, she said, "I want to go—" she jerked her head, "back there."

He sat down again. "I'll wait for that."

So wait, amuse yourself, read about Rorschach's test. She did not turn her head on the way to the Ladies, although she had no intention of seeing or being seen by Jason Hemmer again. With twenty in her pocket she could afford to leave behind the duffel with her ragged possessions. When she was inside with the door closed she transferred the money back to her jeans and reached up on tiptoe to unlatch the tiny frosted window. Nobody but herself could ever have expected to get out by it, and she had her doubts. The last joker who had painted here, God knew when, had cheerfully slopped the guck over latch and hinges; she had to kneel in the filthy sink and wrench with all her strength to get the thing open. The waft of fresh night air that came in was something the like of which the place had never known.

With one foot on the sink rim

and hands supported on the upraised window, now never to be closed in a thousand years, she hooked a leg over the sill. She worked like a contortionist to get the other one over, and inched out writhing on her hard hips. She had to turn her head to get it through, and nearly lost an ear on the sill.

Grimacing with pain, she was about to let go, when she found out why Jason had been so willing to let her sit and talk. It was too late.

Two hard hands clamped on her ankles; a voice in the dark said, "It's okay, Buck; I got her." And she came down into the upreached arms of two tall grinning MPs in tans and arm-bands (not flowered).

2.

MY name is Sandra Ruth Johnson. I was born in Sorrel Park on June 3rd, 2011. Both my parents were born here; their families had settled in thirty or forty years before. My father's name was Lars Johnson, and it was his grandfather, Olaf Jensen, who came here from Denmark and changed his name to make it sound more American, though the family still kept giving their kids first names like Nels and Kristin.

My father was a kind of ratty, vital little man with freckles and

white eyelashes. He was a steamfitter at the power plant, and he had arthritis badly in his hands. The fingers were hard and calloused and permanently curled from handling pipes and wrenches.

My mother was the big soft type of woman that always seems to marry a little scrawny energetic man. Her name was Katherine O'Brian, and her parents were born in Ireland. She had very black hair and blue eyes. She cleaned offices at the plant while they were running the thermonuclear pile, and after the Blowup, when the old coal plant was put to use again, she went over there until I was born, like most of the other workers who survived, and my father kept on wrenching pipes.

I know that some of the people involved were able to have children soon afterwards, but though my parents had had the injections against r-sickness they hadn't had any kids before, and then they were sterile for about seventeen years, and I guess never expected to have any. And my father had been hit in the back by a piece of hot material, and the wound never quite healed. I imagine my arrival was kind of a surprise. My father was forty-seven when I was born, and my mother forty-two. I think. I was three and a half when they died, and since I can't remember much

that happened before I was eighteen years old, that means I can't have really known them for more than two years, so maybe I haven't got everything down correctly.

I couldn't tell you whether they were any different from other people, or any better. I only know that I loved them. My father used to dance me around the room, singing, "Shandy, Shandy, sugar and candy!" and we played all those games that most very little kids play with their fathers. My mother used to wallop me once in a while, but I never considered this particularly unfair; she wore clean cotton housedresses so full of starch they crackled.

I remember very clearly the day my father went into the hospital for the last time. I was nearly three and a half by then. After my mother had packed a few things for him she took the dressing off his back and went into the bathroom to make a fresh one so he could start off clean. I had had a popsicle and came in because my hands were sticky. I was supposed to stay out of the way but they were upset and didn't hear me. My father was sitting on the bed with nothing on but his briefs; his back was towards me . . .

SHE lifted her head and looked out the window, sucking the top of the pen; a small puff of

summer cumulus moved blindly across the field of a vision haunted by memory:

A sunburst with twisting rays of exploded scar, and between the rays thick brown keloids; a humped center of ruined flesh, cracked and oozing, ebbing out beyond the cancerous moles into coinsize blueblack naevi, paling and decreasing till they washed into freckles on white skin.

She jerked her mind away, past the man at the desk and the other one watching immobile in the corner, down to the scribbled pages.

. . . heard a noise and turned. His mouth opened wide; he was about to yell at me and then he stopped. He looked terribly shocked for a moment; I don't know what he saw in my face—I'm not quite certain of what I was thinking, but I do know what I saw. He took a good deep breath and said in a much more gentle voice than he had been going to use before, "Run out and play, kid." I went back out and played. Later he came down with his suitcase and kissed me goodbye. I never saw him again.

We lived over the grocery next door to the Slippecs, and my mother left me with them when she went to the funeral. I didn't do any crying, and I heard Ma Slippec say to Karel, "That kid gives me the shivers."

SUNBURST

When my mother came back from the funeral in her black dress with her eyes swollen, she hugged me and cried again and said, "You just don't know what it's all about, do you, sweetie?" But adults don't realize how sensitive even not very bright children are to these things. I've seen it plenty of times in the children of the oldest Slippec boy and girl, and as far as I can tell they're about dull normal.

My mother had stopped work when she had me, but when my father died she had to go back to her old job and she had the Slippecs take care of me. They were a rowdy lot, always having the kind of fights that blow over like summer thunderstorms—but they weren't mean. My mother didn't care much for them, especially because the old man was in jail again as usual, but she figured if Ma Slippec could keep her own six kids alive and healthy she could do the same for me.

But then my mother started coming home more tired and sick every day. First she couldn't get my supper, and after a while she could hardly get me to bed. I began to be afraid. My father had gone away so casually . . .

One day she couldn't go to work, and she stayed in bed for a few days—she was terribly pale, and her skin was hot. Ma Slippec called the ambulance for her, finally, and packed her some

clothes in the same suitcase my father took. She smiled at me from the stretcher, and said she'd be back soon—but she'd become thin . . . her hair was so black, and her skin so white against it . . .

SHANDY put the pen aside and lined up the sheets, and folded them across, down over her closed childhood. She got up, handed them to the man at the desk, and went to the window.

Outside she could see a court-yard, surrounded by a brick wall with iron gates. There were three jeeps parked in the court. She had been brought here by one of them the night before. Beyond that there was an asphalt pavement; an electrified fence, sentry-guarded, enclosed all of this and also a huge acreage empty of everything but grasses, wild-flowers, and the Dump.

A great circle bounded by a wall of heavy fieldstone covered with concrete, topped by barbed-wire, and implanted with several dozens of huge antennas emitting the buzzing scrambler circuit known as the Marczinek Field. It was impossible to see what was inside the Dump, and she did not want to. Sometimes the dull wash of a savage roar of sound beat against the windowpanes. Other times there was only the buzz of the Field.

Beyond the Dump, the vast meadow, and the fence, there was a deep culvert, last ditch against the road threading the world outside.

Urquhart cleared his throat rather peremptorily and she came back to the little table and sat down. He was a youngish balding man with hornrimmed glasses; his elbow was resting firmly on Rorschach's Test: he



was its owner. He pulled a thread from a frayed cuff and folded his pink rawboned hands. He had made little red-ink notes on the margins of her ms., which she imagined as: *Use of "ratty" in conj. w. father—signifi.?* and *Sight of scar—poss. trauma?*

He had not bothered to ask her whether she had read up on Wechsler-Bellevue, Stanford-Binet, Charlebois, Porteous, because Jason Hemmer was useless as a lie-detector in her case, and with psi in question no-one took anything on trust; he had been obliged to make do with whatever methods he could devise on the moment. His manner was not bland; she had stripped the tools from his hands and he was not in a mood to forgive her for it.

She herself was beginning to wonder if she had been so smart. It might have been a great deal simpler and safer to take the tests cold and perhaps learn more at the outcome. But she was interested. She had played one round of the game with Jason Hemmer and lost, without resentment; she was ready for the second.

Some crazy chance had decreed that when the psi mutation hit the human race it would choose the type of child most likely to develop the psychopathic personality, and every one of the forty-seven Dumplings had been through Urquhart's mill,

psi and all. He could marvel that he was still alive. She felt that dealing with an absolutely non-psi, and an Impervious as well, could be a welcome change of pace for him.

Psi is for psychopath, what I am not, and don't you forget!

Urquhart unplaited his fingers and leaned down to switch on the tape-recorder. "You feel justified in labelling the Slippec grandchildren as dull normal?"

She was taken aback, but answered, "As long as I'm not handing out the Prognostic Indexes."

"Do you have any evidence for this kind of judgment?"

"Three years of close observation; I did a lot of babysitting."

"What did you observe?" The words might have been assumed a sarcasm. The tone betrayed some genuine interest.

"Co-ordination, speech and play-patterns, vocabulary, group interaction—" she shrugged, "—what you look at in kids."

"Why?"

"I don't know why. I just wanted to know."

"Anything in particular?"

"Only whatever there is to find out."

"That's why you took this—" he thumped the Rorschach with his elbow.

She reddened. "Partly. Mostly I wanted to know how to keep out of the Dump."

"Every child in Sorrel Park has been here—except you, and most of them have gone home again. Why did you think we might want you particularly?"

"I didn't want to take any chances. I admit now that taking it wasn't such a bright idea."

He humped and built his long fingers into a steeple. "You say here, about your father: 'I don't know what he saw in my face.' I wonder about that."

She waited.

"I think you do, you know. You say what you realized about your mother, when she became sick. I think you might try to remember what you thought when you were looking at your father's back."

She admitted, "Maybe I can, but I don't know that it's not a false memory."

"Why should it be?"

"Because it doesn't seem reasonable, even to me, that a three-year-old, no matter how bright, could look at that thing and know that a man was going to die from it—and that it could show so clearly in my face he could read it there."

URQUHART shifted in his chair, and the man in the corner brought out a pipe and tobacco-pouch.

"Don't you think it's more likely that what shocked your father was your *calm*—after the

initial shock of finding you looking at something he normally concealed? The fact that you didn't cry at the sight?"

Shandy said calmly, "The only time I ever cried was when my hands or my body wouldn't work the way I wanted, or I couldn't find out something I wanted to know. I could throw tantrums over those things, but not sorrow or fear."

"Pain?"

She smiled. "Not from being smacked. I went into a rage if the pain was the result of my own clumsiness."

Urquhart pinched his lower lip and looked at the sheets again.

Shandy folded her hands in her lap and said gently, "Try Rorschach?"

As Urquhart raised his head, glaring, there was a subdued rat-a-tat-tat from the corner, and both turned their heads. The thin old man who had been sitting so silent and immobile was now trying to bite the pipe-stem to keep from laughing. He had a narrow ascetic hawkface and a thick quiff of white hair. Though he was wearing army trousers, his shirt was a gaudy cotton emblazoned with palm trees and sunsets, a duplicate of which Shandy had seen Mrs. Pyper retailing for \$2.49.

Early in the morning, through the window of her room, she had

heard a resonant voice bass singing: "Many Brave Hearts Are Asleep In The Deep," and when she stuck her head out she saw the bent back of the old man in his colored shirt; he was digging in a small flowerbed beneath the window. He complemented the flowers in his shirt, and his selection of plants was as wayward and eccentric as his taste in clothes. Wild, blowsy poppies straggled in and out madly among ragged tulips with dropping petals, colors crazily mixed. Alternately he hummed, bellowed, or swore as he rubbed a callused thumb. She had wondered what his place was in the scheme of things here.

Urquhart, glancing at him, said, "Come off it, Marsh." His tone was tolerant, almost bantering, and Shandy for the first time looked thoughtfully at the man himself. He was wearing a tweed suit, not tans. Perhaps to emphasize a difference, as the older man had done with the loony shirt. But the latter had succumbed to army pants, while he . . . *I'm only here as a temporary consultant, thank you, so I won't need . . .*

Eight years. He had been a lot younger when he first heard of the strange consequences of the Blowup. A rising young psychiatrist? Some older doctor's Bright Young Man? The suit was frayed. Eight years docked from

the prime of learning and earning. Forced as well to learn the techniques for giving and analyzing Rorschach and other tests because it wasn't feasible to keep a whole battery of psychiatric social workers for forty-seven children with whom it was almost useless, as well as dangerous, to come into contact.

"Well," the man in the corner broke his silence. "Sheath the swords and call it a draw."

Urquhart smiled. Then he said, "Listen, Shandy, I'll admit I haven't the patience and tolerance I once had and ought to have now. I'm not trying to burn you down to the stump. But I like to find out things about people too."

"But I have no psi."

"You haven't *now*. I know that; even if you had some special or superior kind I don't believe you would have been able to conceal it all these years. But even with your height and age you haven't reached puberty yet—and I've seen how these things work. Who knows what you might be able to do later?"

"Then why—"

"No, I'm not worried about psychopathic or schizophrenic trends. But you are an Impervious. I've never seen one, and I want to know how you tick. It's special and rare, and it might be very useful to us one day." He sighed. "If you weren't so young,

it'd be a lot of use to us right now."

But he would not elaborate.

SHE rested her arms on the sill of her window and looked out into the evening. Her room faced away from the Dump; she was glad of that. There was a stretch of lawn around the flower plot, and beyond that, the brick wall with its gate, the asphalt road, and several wooden barracks buildings for the Military. Lights were on in them. She thought of the lamplight she had watched in the dusky streets the evening before, when she was free.

She had not seen Jason since she arrived. She had sat beside him on the hard jouncing seat of the jeep, grateful that noise and movement had made conversation impossible. She had sensed him becoming glummer and glummer as the ride went on, and finally when they turned into the courtyard and were getting out, he had looked at her, warily, and said, "You mad?" She had said no, and that was it.

There were no bars on her window, but it was two floors up. Unless she were willing to break her neck it was useless to climb out. The room was clean; it contained a bed, table, chest of drawers, and chair. There was a closet and a small windowless bathroom off it. She would have

considered it luxurious if there had not been a soldier standing guard outside the door.

She had been interviewed by Urquhart, measured and encephalographed by a white-coated woman doctor in a wheelchair, pumped for minute autobiographical details by a grim Colonel Prothero; she was feeling raw and badly used. Her mind and person, private all her life, had been probed too deeply within the day to suit even her enthusiasm for the acquisition of knowledge.

What am I? I want to know... but I won't find out from them.

Lights were blinking out in the barracks, and even in the other wing of the redbrick ell she was in. Soldiers slept early, and so did their commanders. Her light was out. She got into bed and slept.

SHE leaped awake completely disoriented, blinking at the foreign shapes of the crack of light round the door and the starlit window. She shook her head. There was a racket down below, and the barked commands, doorslams, and running about had brought her a rare nightmare: she had crouched in the street with Jason once more, shivering and sick with the terrors of the CP raid. Now wide awake and listening, she felt a small stab of fear.

Nearly everyone in Sorrel Park shared a contempt that was deep and sincere for both the civvies and the MPs. At the same time the same people had developed a fear of a Dump escape comparable to fears in other times and places of plague and atomic war. Shandy was aware of the incongruity of these emotions, but she had some share in both of them. Only, she sometimes sensed, to have a bond with humanity . . . because, when she thought about it, she had little to lose.

She ran to the window and looked out. All was calm outside; the grounds were tinged with dull yellow light from the windows below. She opened the door a crack. The soldier was gone, perhaps called down by whatever emergency was going on. She could get out of the building now, probably, but the gates would be manned. And there was excitement going on down below. She headed for it.

The iron staircase was cold to her bare feet; on the lower floor she discovered the source of the noise from the first doorway. The door was ajar.

She pushed it open a little further and peered in. The room was adjacent to Colonel Prothero's office, and in its opposite doorway two soldiers were supporting a person almost unrecognizable as human. His head was

hanging down and his clothes and skin were covered with blood and almost incredible filth.

She glimpsed Prothero snarling and knuckling his yellow-bristled head as though to pull all the hair out. He was in pajamas. Khaki. The woman doctor, crisp and immaculately white-coated as she had been during the afternoon, swivelled her chair in front of Shandy's line of vision and said quietly, "Lay him down on the couch there."

The spattered thing hanging between the soldiers raised its head. It was Jason Hemmer. One eye was closed and black; he had a bleeding bruise on the cheek below it, and his lips were swollen. He muttered thickly, "Figured they were asleep . . . they were laying for me . . ."

Prothero snuffed like a horse. "You heard what she said! Get him down there!"

SHANDY craned her neck as the men set Jason on the couch. The doctor wheeled over and obscured the view, dabbing with swabs of cotton and antiseptic.

Jason's voice ran thickly, broken by groans as the sting of soap and antiseptic hit the raw. "Jocko broke a collar-bone, growing in—ouch, dammit!—all crooked—"

"He's a tough one . . ." the woman murmured, turning mo-

mentarily to throw a wad of cotton in a wastebasket, "—don't know if he'll let me—"

"Yeah . . . Doydoy's got a sore on his neck . . . the Kingfish's got an—"

"Hold still, now. This one will hurt."

"—ugh—abscessed tooth, been drivin' everybody else nuts—in fact he started this whole thing with me—"

"Get it all down, Tapley!" Pro-

thero roared. "What are you gawking for, man?" Tapley fumbled for his notebook.

"—and LaVonne—she's hopeless!"

"Well, you'll try to sort her out for me tomorrow," she said cheerfully. "That's about all for now, isn't it?"

"Yeah. Oh—" Jason raised himself up on an elbow, gasping painfully, and Shandy saw his grimacing face over the white



shoulder. "Colonel . . . Colin's all right."

Prothero grunted.

Shandy, unable to restrain herself, had slipped into the room, flat against the wall, in the shadow by the door.

"And Frankie Slippec?" she whispered.

Jason turned his head. "He's okay, he—say! Who are you? I never saw you before—jeez, I can't read you! What—"

"Lie back, Jason dear," the doctor said, and added without moving, "and you, Shandy, go back to bed now, please."

Shandy, suddenly conscious of her threadbare nightgown and her bare feet, cringed and slipped out quickly. But she lingered in the hall long enough to see Urquhart move past the doorway and bend over Jason Hemmer.

"Lie still now, Jason. Go to sleep, boy, and we'll start getting rid of those blocks. That's right, close your eyes. Now I'm going to count down from fifteen, and when I get to one . . ."

3.

WHEN the soldier brought the tray next morning, Shandy greeted him with a Pollyanna smile of such sweetness and radiance that it made her innards lurch.

"There's something wrong with the thing," she said.

The soldier, a lantern-jawed

ectomorph suffering from hangover, forced his bloodshot eyes open a little and mumbled, "Huh? Whazzat, little girl?"

Shandy, five-seven in her socks, folded her hands in her lap and piped, "Please, sir, there's something wrong with the thing. In there." She jabbed a finger in the direction of the bathroom.

"I don't handle stuff like that, kid. You'll hafta wait'll I can get a plumber."

"Oh, please! I'm sure you can fix it. I just don't know how it works."

He sighed, rubbed a head that was almost visibly throbbing, and shambled toward the bathroom.

"Right in there," she said. She had the chair ready, and once he was inside she slammed the door and rammed the chairback under the knob. She put her mouth against the crack and yelled, "Hey, boychuk, soak your head, you'll feel better!" and was out in the hall with the door closed behind her before the first muffled bellow escaped.

There was no-one in the hall, but that state of affairs wasn't going to last long, and she was anxious to discuss a few things with Jason. She tiptoed down the rattan carpet. Most of the doors were closed and she didn't dare open them; a couple of open ones revealed beds and tables as stark as her own. There were two last

doors at the end. If they yielded nothing she would have to go back and face the wrath of her captive, or try her luck downstairs. One room was empty, but from the other a low voice called, "Shandy!"

He was in bed, wearing a pair of white pajamas with blue arrows that gave him, with his closed-cropped head, the look of a Dartmoor convict. His face was black and blue, but most of the swelling had gone down. She wondered if he were able to use his psi on himself.

"Hi." His look was still wary.

"Hi," she said cheerfully. She struck an exaggerated pose against the doorjamb and said with deadpan insolence, "You look like you forgot to ask yourself what would Margaret Mead have done."

He half rose from the bed, and she was about to run, but he lay back and said, "Never mind. Maybe I'll ask you that one day."

She grinned and sat down on a chair by the bed. Jason folded his arms in back of his head, looked up at the ceiling, and said casually, "You know, somebody's just busted outa the john, and whooee, is he mad!"

At that moment there was a yell of outrage from down the hall, and Shandy was out of her chair and behind the door with the swiftness of reflex. Her

eyes were on Jason, but not to beg. He could do as he pleased.

The voice roared through the doorway, "Hey peeper, you see where that—that damn brat went?"



Jason let it hang for a fraction of a second. Then he said quietly, "Why—she's in her room, Davey. Where'd you think she could get to?"

"Gee . . . yeah, I guess you're right . . . but I sure thought there was somethin' funny goin' on for a minute."

She waited till the steps had

gone down the hall and sat on the chair again. "Psi's handy."

"I get some use out of it once in a while." He reached under his pillow and found a crumpled pack of cigarettes.

She indicated his beaten face. "This is what they hate you for in Sorrel Park?"

"They don't know about it. When they see me they don't usually want to stop and give me a chance to explain."

"You could make them know."

"So what?" He blew smoke at the ceiling. "They know I can read their minds and make them do whatever I want. Isn't that enough?"

"They might understand."

"No. Not the kind of people that have that kind of kids. It might give them a snide laugh to know their kids can beat me up once in a while. Maybe I should not deny them that bit of pleasure—but it's not a good pleasure, so it won't hurt them to miss it."

She looked down at her hands. "It gave me no pleasure. And I used to despise you too."

"You're different."

"I hope so." She looked out of the window at the barbed wire, the brick wall, the iron gates. "Why are you doing all this?"

He sighed and blew ashes over the bedclothes. "Nothing stops you."

She stood up. "Maybe I don't know enough about dealing with

people. I'll keep out of your way till I do."

"Sit down, you silly nut. I told you it's hard for me to talk to anybody I can't read."

She sat down unwillingly. He said, "Somebody's coming, don't get scared."

She waited. Jason ground out his cigarette and said, "Marsh."

"It's me." The old man came in. He had exchanged the orange and green sunsets for red tropical flowers with blue leaves. "I came to see how you were. I see you already have company."

"I'm ready for the next trip," said Jason, with only the faintest hint of sarcasm. "Shandy, this is Dr. Jaroslav Marczinek."

"Oh," said Shandy. "The Field. Now I know why you're here."

Jason sighed again. "You'll never get a simple good-morning from this girl."

"Good morning, Dr. Marczinek," said Shandy. "Why were you sitting in with Dr. Urquhart?"

The old man ignored Jason's snort. "To improve my mind," he said seriously, "as far as that's possible here."

Shandy nodded and turned to Jason. "It's nothing to be peeved at. Other people ask you questions when they come here."

"I can find ways of shutting them up," said Jason. "With you it's different. And the people who

ask you questions have a reasonable purpose."

"I am different. How do you know I haven't a purpose? Just because I don't know what it is doesn't mean there may not be one hidden inside me . . . Dr. Marczinek, you seem to find me very amusing."

THE old man finished out his laugh. "Oh, yes indeed, and very refreshing—though you may also turn out to be very dangerous."

"And you're awfully truthful."

"You mean awesomely, I hope. I have to be—"

"Now Marsh—" Jason began.

"I can see why you have to be hypnotized," said Shandy.

"What? You're way ahead of me—"

"When you go to check on the Dump. Urquhart sets up the blocks so they won't know everything that's going on."

"That's right."

"Do they ever try to break the blocks?"

"Not usually. They might make it if they tried hard, but it's too much like work. Lucky most of them live on the surface."

"And the rest?"

"I dunno . . . there's one or two . . . never mind." He touched his bruised head experimentally. "If the toughest ones were really smart . . . and the smart ones

really knew how to use their power and their brains . . ."

Marczinek said, "Jason, before I forget, Grace wants to know if you're feeling well enough to complete her lists of broken teeth and dislocated shoulders."

"Yeah. Tell her to come along. You met the doctor, didn't you?" he asked Shandy.

"Yes," said Shandy. "How does she take care of the kids?"

There was a bit of an edge to Jason's voice. "She wheels herself in there and cleans them up, and they treat *her* very respectful and polite."

"How come?"

Jason grinned. "I let them know Prothero told me he'd drop a bomb on the Dump if they so much as gave her a cross-eyed look."

"But he's not gonna drop any bombs for you."

"Nope. You don't have to mention anything about bombs to her, though. She's a nice old doll without a mean thought in her head, and I don't want her feelings hurt."

"He's a man of true sensibility," said Marczinek. He had been puffing at his pipe and watching Shandy with a curiosity as unabashed as her own. "Shandy, you were saying before that you felt different. Why?"

"I don't know why . . . I've just had the idea since I was very small. I've been trying to find out

something about it ever since."

"You are Impervious, solitary, inconspicuous. Along with intelligence, I should think that would be enough. Everyone is different."

"Everyone is individual," said Shandy firmly, "but nearly everyone is a lot like hundreds of other people. The kids in the Dump are a lot like each other—and like plenty of others who aren't in the Dump—except that these are extremes, and they have psi.

"But I'm not like most kids who get brought up any old way; that's part of it. I haven't had much love or attention spent on me for the last ten years, but I've never wanted to break out against everything or hate the world for my tough luck. I'm not unhappy." She shrugged. "Sometimes I think I must have something missing, and sometimes I think I have something added on, and if I didn't have it I *would* be unhappy. . . ."

"A kind of equilibrium," Marczinek suggested.

"I guess so. Something like that. But I see other people whom I'm almost sure haven't got it, and they seem to get along all right, even with their ups and downs . . . I get scared sometimes, because I could waste a lot of my life and miss good things just hanging around waiting for something special to turn up."

Marczinek puffed in silence for a moment, and said, "I don't imagine you're the type to turn down a good thing when it's offered to you, Shandy, or refuse to go after it once you see it clear."

"I hope not," said Shandy. "Maybe I'm only being silly."

"No," said Jason sombrely. "I thought I was different once, too."

"But you had more to go on. How did you find out?"

LIKE you read about in stories. I was about ten . . . out playing alleys with a couple of guys named Charley and Pink. I had a winning streak all of a sudden—I guess I must've been wishing extra hard because I didn't have many alleys — and Charley knocked my best purey out of the ring and said: beat that, you jerk! And I said, 'You're damn right I will!' and they both looked at me as if I was nuts. Charley says, 'What did you go say that for? I never said nothing to you!' And I started scratching my head . . .

"It was funny, you know, because I could still hear the echo of my own voice in my ears, but nothing before that. I says, 'Didn't you say: beat that, you jerk?' He turned white as a sheet—he's Iroquois, and it took some doing—and said, 'That's what I was thinking!'

"Jeez, was I scared! I shoved my alleys in the bag and ran for home, up the stairs and sat on the bed, just shaking. My mother was running the mixer down in the kitchen and hardly noticed I was there. I didn't want to talk to *anybody*. I was grabbing that bag of alleys so hard my hand hurt, thinking: I start out with sixteen alleys, now I've got fifty-seven—and I've read a guy's mind . . . like that stuff in stories, and maybe I really could do something with my mind. So I put the alley bag on the floor and loosened the string and said, 'Git outa there! Get outa there!' Nothing happened, and I didn't know whether to be disappointed or glad. I thought, well, I'll try once more. I willed them to come out and squeezed at them from my whole insides, and wow! there was a rumble in the bag and they started to pour out and rattle all over the floor.

"Rattle! It was thunder! You'da thought the Imp bust outa the bottle. If I was scared before—it still hurts to think of it. They were shooting out so hard I had the idea they were going to bounce off the walls and ceiling and beat down on me like hail. I scrunched down in the bed and closed my eyes. My mother yelled up, 'Jason, what's all that racket!' and I couldn't say a word. When I got the nerve to open my eyes they were on the

floor, just a few of them rolling around a bit. I grabbed them up and stuck them in the bag and that was it."

"And you didn't play again for a while, I suppose," Marczinek said.

"Well, no, I didn't have that much imagination. I was too scared to try anything else for a day or two, but I was working myself up to it. It was too important just to forget. But I didn't see Charley and Pink around—I think they must have spread the word and everybody was leaving me alone—but I didn't care much because I wanted to work it out. I mooched around like that for a couple of days . . . worried my mother because I wasn't coming home cruddled up with dirt from head to foot. And one night when I went to bed I swore I was going to try it out first thing in the morning . . ."

Girls and boys, come out to play,

The moon doth shine as bright as day;

The moon was shining. Shandy Johnson, a sallow, thin child of five, slept in the narrow cot. Her sleep was silent and still and almost dreamless; she was not disturbed through the night, even though two or three of the Slippec girls were tossing and muttering in the big bed across the room.

It was a quarter after eleven. Sorrel Park was a small city; there were not many people in the streets on an early September evening. The place was quiet, though there had been rumblings of uneasiness in the last few days. Several fruitstalls had been turned over; no-one saw who had done it. Three manhole covers had disappeared; neither they nor the thief had been found. A bottle had exploded in the hands of a drunk as he was raising it to his mouth; it took two internes three hours to pick the glass out of his face and hands—he had only just missed losing his eyes. The thimble-rigger at Muley's Inn had lost his shirt and his self-confidence.

Jason Hemmer had won too many marbles.

There were ripening talents in the place, scattered, raw, and destructive. They belonged to children who gradually, over months and years, had singly awakened to an unchildish power and begun to use it in bursts of destruction. They were self-centered, out for the advantage.

Twisting restlessly in sleep, flying and powerful in their dreams, they were integrated, waiting for a form: twenty-eight boys, five girls, sullen, discontented, hostile.

One other ten-year-old boy beside Jason Hemmer was deeply disturbed. He was lying awake,

furious because his father had whipped him for stealing a jetscooter and staying out after dark to avoid punishment. His name was Colin Prothero; his father, the Major, was fifty-four years old, too old to remember what a boy was like. The boy had careered about the dark streets, swift and free, until he was caught by the CivilPolice, an added indignity for the Military. He lay still in his bed, rigid with anger and resentment.

His parents were asleep in the next room. They could sleep; it was nothing for them to shame him. He tightened his closed lids, heard voices. A voice.

Dammit, why should he turn out like? He's had every. I always. When I was his. And it had to be the civvies. Why?

His father was awake, then. So much the better. Let him suffer too. He waited for his mother's answering murmur. The house was perfectly silent. He heard his father turning in bed. Silence. And again: *In the morning, see about . . .* and a mind sunk in sleep. A mind—not a voice drifting into the unconscious. *A mind.*

A talent stirred. Almost unaware of what he was doing he began to probe—down into that thick skull of his father's, under the khaki-bristled hair, under the cortical laminations of sternness, resolution, duty—and

stopped, repelled by a pain he could not understand.

He retreated, frightened at the enormity of the sudden power, and twitched nervously on the bed. The pain of his welted back washed over him and woke the anger once more; he forgot everything else. *When I grow up—when he grew up, what then? What could he show that unyielding man?* He didn't dare plan revenge, but he could catalogue the crimes of injustice and humiliation against him.

Someone whispered in his ear: me too.

Who?

Me, me, me, me, me too.

Thoughts flickered in and out of his mind like dust-motes in a sunbeam. The beam thickened and whitened: sleepers were stirring in their dreams, awakening thoughts caught in the pulsing flow. It grew in the mind, a white singing like blood in the compressed veins of the brain. Old men twisted in tangled night-clothes, caught dreaming in passions withered through seventy years; babies woke shrieking as though their brains had been seared in the lightning of mind-force. Touched off by Colin Prothero's pain and resentment, thirty-four minds coalesced in a critical mass, and at last, a discovered form.

Leave your supper, and leave your sleep,

And come with your playfellows into the street.

Curtis Quimper, who at eighteen had known something of his powers for several years, ran down the midnight street silently screaming into the minds of all wild things. He had stolen three manhole-covers, and a few nights ago in the dark of an open field had sent them whirling in a planetary dance of hate around his head, clashing like cymbals, at last crashing together in a single welded mass and plunging down through the earth, atomizing moles in their burrows and melting streams of ore in the crevices of rocks below.

I can do that with anything or anybody, anything or anybody, anything or anybody!

If the form was a pack, Curtis Quimper was the leader.

* * *

Scooter King, fourteen and six months out of Juvenile Detention, rose at the imperious call. He had been asleep on a pile of sacking in Koerner-the-Florist's woodshed. His father was in jail, and his mother, with seven other children, had almost forgotten he existed. The rotted door shrieked off its hinges and fell at his frantic push; he scrambled out and ran.

* * *

LaVonne Hurley, a dwarf with a twisted compressed body and a mind equally ugly teleported her-

self into the street and scrambled on short thick legs. Her arm ached terribly because a sister had wrenched it the day before, but she was perfectly happy for the first time in her life.

* * *

Frankie Slippec pulled himself out of bed from between his two sleeping brothers, jumped into his pants, and pulled an old jersey over his head. It was full of holes, and his skin shone through them like dull silver coins in the moonlight as he jumped off the windowsill, landed lightly two stories down, and ran with the rest.

Come with a whoop, come with a call,

Come with a good will or not at all.

Donatus Riordan threshed and screamed in his bed. He was a hunchback with spinal bifida and the children called him Doydoy because of his painful stutter. He had a comfortable bed in a clean room; he was well loved and cared for; his parents were perfectly decent people and there was nothing wrong with his moral sense—but either the Blowup or some other freak chance had done something terrible to the chromosome pattern that formed him and he could not help himself.

When his parents ran into the room they found him hovering

near the ceiling; he was yelling and flailing his arms; the sheets were twisted round his useless legs and trailing in a rope. He wrenched them away with the sweep of a powerful arm and disappeared before they could even think of reaching for him. There was a queer sucking noise as the air rushed to fill in the space he had occupied.

THE force flared and streamed; the town was dreaming. Every ugly thought locked in the mind broke and dragged with it the animal hates and terrors of childhood, the horrors of the Blowup, and all the small bestiaries accumulated by even the sanest mind living the calmest life.

No-one else ran down into the street, though all felt for an instant the flash of the irrational urge. But none of them wanted to go to sleep again, once wakened. They sat on the edges of their beds, trembling, and lit cigarettes, or got up to turn on lights and put on coffee, with an ear tuned for the coming of thunder.

Jason Hemmer stood on the sidewalk, rubbing his eyes. The telepathic surge had washed him out of his bed and into the street before he was half-asleep. He had used a power he had not known he possessed. Behind him he heard his mother closing

down the windows against the expected storm without knowing he was out of the house. He stepped into the middle of the road, dazed; the sky was clear with moonlight. Far down, far away, he heard the clamor of the Pack.

They had passed with the sound of Djinns, and their unearthly echo rang in his brain. He could have joined them yet, but somehow he did not, and only stood there, with his arms limp at his sides, looking down the road.

He heard his mother calling in sudden terror: "Jason! Jason!" and he turned back to the house, stumbling on bare feet. He had missed the express to Transylvania.

Shandy slept.

Up the ladder and down the wall,

A half-penny roll will serve us all.

You find milk and I'll find flour,

And we'll have a pudding in half an hour!

The Pack ran down the main street toward the town's center at the crossing. They had no name for themselves, but they were a single entity, and, except for the oddments, very much of a piece. The older ones had powerful shoulders, but they were all wiry and strong, the girls

stringy. Their narrow faces tapered like the muzzles of wolves, shapes that marked patterns on the graphs of sociologists, along with the poverty, the hate, the heritage of crime and drunkenness, and the turbulence of movement that for once was dedicated to a single purpose.

Where do we start?

Start at the middle and work out. That's nice and tidy.

Civvies'll be comin' in a minute.

Ya scared mumsyboy? Hide under the bed. Hey fellas, lookit Doydoy! Hey Doydoy, flap your wings!

Jeez, I can't fly. How come he can?

Who cares? Here—take a look around, you guys! You'll never see it like this again!

Beinwinder's Emporium: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight plate-glass windows . . . bye-bye!

Now melt it, Scooter—he, you missed one! Yeah . . . now make the fire green and blue . . .

I never knew you were artistic, Buttsy.

Vogeler's Antique-y Shoppy—yeah, yeah—let's stick old Vogeler in there first—"Gitcher filthy mitts offa that stuff!"

Never mind him—wow!

Here, Nolan's Marketeria . . . them cans'll pop if y' git'm hot . . . that's it, boy!

Who's that?

Sergeant Fox is that you?
"Hel-lo, Foxy, ain't this a
beeyootiful quiet evening? Hey,
Foxy-loxy, don't touch the gun,
you'll burn your hand!"

Gee whiz, he done it. Ain't he a
nut? Look Ma, no hand!

Noisy, isn't he?

"You broke my wrist bringin'
me in, Foxy, remember?"

Too damn noisy. Shut him up,
LaVonne.

There's the sirens. Th' civ-
vies're comin', Hooray, hooray!

Okey-doke, LaVonne, just goo
up the road a little.

"I'll stop their noise, too," said
LaVonne. "I like things quiet."

4.

I SAW it all—I heard it all." Ja-
son Hemmer twitched and
sweated in his bed. "I went in
the house and crawled in bed,
told my mother I'd been sleep-
walking, and she didn't ask any
more questions. My God!" He
shivered. "I was lying there—
and I knew everything—and I
wanted to be with them. I had to
be with them!"

"Why weren't you?" asked
Shandy.

"It'd be terrific if I could say I
was too moral . . . but I think I
just wasn't strong enough—not
to do all the things they were do-
ing. And I hadn't the hate gath-
ering up in me all those years . . .
ordinary kids are full of fight

and fury but they don't usually
grow a cancer out of it."

"Doydoy?"

"He was scared—and he had
too many powers for them to
dare to let him go. He doesn't
really belong with the rest."

"He shouldn't be in the Dump,
in that case."

"What would you do with him,
Shandy? He's one of the strong-
est as far as psi goes."

"Mmm—and LaVonne?"

"Ugh!" Jason grimaced. "List-
ten, nobody's ever claimed the
Dump was the perfect, or even a
decent, solution." He lit another
cigarette. "So I was lying there,
watching it all like a movie,
scared to death and wanting to
be with them at the same time—
and the police came up. At least
they managed to run up on the
sidewalks when the cars were
bogging down in melted asphalt.
The MP was on its way, too, by
then. The kids were waiting.
They'd already found Old Foggy
sleeping in a doorway and
burned his clothes off, and they
had some dinky plans for the
civvies—oh boy!—but just as
they were about to start the fun
one of those burst cans popping
out of the store hit a kid in the
neck—it was Billy Phipps—
sliced the jugular and killed him.
When they saw their own blood,
they stopped."

"I'd have thought they'd be
tougher than that," said Shandy.

"Not then. The extent of their power at the beginning depended on the pack's being at full strength. When one of them died they weakened and separated. Gee . . . a lot of them were kids my own age . . . a couple of girls in nightgowns and braids . . . all scrunched together and scared of death. Doydoy was trying to crawl away on his hands . . ." He swabbed his head with a corner of the sheet and it came away wet.

"You knew him?"

"Yeah. I used to call him names when I saw him wheeling around the corner for a bottle of milk and a pound of tomatoes."

"You were only a little kid then, though."

"Yeah. I know. I—I tried to get him away . . . I knew he was not one of them, and even if I wanted to be with them I knew it wasn't the kind of thing I ought to want."

"But that's just where Urquhart would separate the sheep from the goats, I bet."

"Sure—I was a sheep then and I'm a sheep now. I had a very low pk range, not in their class at all. But I'm glad I tried."

"Anyhow, the civvies came up with stunguns and knocked them over. Then they carted them off to the morgue and laid them out like logs, all unconscious, and I tried to figure out what had hit Sorrel Park. That was twelve-ten

a.m. The whole damn thing took less than an hour, and the middle of town looked like a baby A-bomb hit it.

"Prothero took over right away—of course, he had Colin in the thing, too. He dragged out all the doctors in Sorrel Park, got them cleaning up Foggy and Sergeant Fox—and boy, they were a mess—had the kids loaded with hypos and started on intravenous—and got Washington on the phone, all within two hours after the bust."

"He looks like the type," said Shandy.

"Yeah, but he's not stupid, and he'd had plenty of experience with emergencies after the Blow-up. This place has been a top-secret-emergency deal for a long time."

MARCZINEK added, "Sorrel Park hardly belonged to the Union after twenty-two years of isolation. With the whole country on nuclear power the news of a serious accident, rare as it was, might have turned everything awry."

"I can't believe it was right to hide it," said Shandy.

"I won't argue, my dear, but the suppression was supremely efficient. I had only the vaguest recollection of the trouble when I was called upon to come here."

"Why'd they pick you?"

"At that time I was fairly

prominent in the field of quantum electrodynamics."

Jason laughed. "Prominent in the field! He shared a Nobel Prize with Brahmagupta for a Unified Field Theory!"

"I see," said Shandy, and continued to watch Marczinek.

Jason slapped his thigh. "She doesn't even know what a Nobel Prize is!"

"I know what a Nobel Prize is," said Shandy.

Marczinek said softly, "Brahmagupta died of cancer of the liver at thirty-five . . . I was with him to the end, and it was a foul death. I am seventy-two years old and I have eleven grandchildren. I haven't seen them for eight years, and one or two of them not all, but I have them.

"Well, I was sent for. I was told only that it was an emergency, and that if I accepted I must stay until the problem was solved. Now," he knocked his pipe on his heel, "I know everything and I am too dangerous, like everyone else here . . ." his face was blank. "I am not strong enough to go through with the brainwash the soldiers here are given when their terms end—and I am too old to want to lose an hour's worth of memories, even . . .

"Oh, I remember how I first saw them when I arrived here . . . lying on their cots in the hospital, sleeping children. Deeply

drugged children. Urquhart and Grace Halsey had taken encephalograms—perhaps you know that they still have the brainwaves of children even today."

"Yes, but their type has a kind of burnout in the thirties, don't they?" Shandy asked. "I've heard their brainwaves change then too."

"True," said Marczinek dryly, "but that prospect at that time was twenty-five years in the future, and we had to do something immediately.

"I had to work from nothing, you understand. Who knows the mechanics of psychokinesis and teleportation? No-one, yet. But there must be some kind of wave between telepathic sender and receiver, the object moved and the mover, the teleport and his destination."

"And you built the Field to scramble them."

"In the simplest terms, yes. I still hardly know what I am scrambling, but the Field covers a wide range."

"Is there a way to break through it?"

Marczinek hesitated. "Theoretically, yes. A bare possibility. Not a thing I'm free to discuss."

"Oh, I don't want to know your secrets," Shandy said hastily.

"Ho, ho," said Jason. "Anyway, it's like breaking into Fort Knox, and I'm the only other person who knows about it. I'm not

sure I understand it, so I guess it's safe."

"I can see why you needed those blocks of Urquhart's," said Shandy. "Do you have brain-waves like a little kid?"

Jason grinned. "That's also classified information!"

SHE said thoughtfully, "Suppose I were in the Dump and decided to make a good deep hole and tip myself up to the surface at an angle, from under the Field?"

Marczinek shook his head. "The Field's a long narrow torus, shaped like a drinking-straw. It goes down into the eternal fires, and up beyond the limits of the atmosphere."

"I'll have to think of something else, then."

"You're not in the Dump yet, so don't worry," Jason retorted. "But you ought to think up something better than that trick you played with the bathroom window at Jake's."

She was sheepish. "That was embarrassing, but I haven't had much experience with psi."

"It wasn't even psi, it was radio!"

"Well, I do a lot better dodging civvies. Dr. Marczinek, how long did it take you to build the Field?"

"Build! They wanted to give me three days to *invent* it! Three days." He clucked resignedly.

"To invent a toroidal white-noise field that would scramble everything but light radiations—because growing children need light, even if their souls are dark . . . but it took a week." He began to fill his pipe. "Out in the world it has some use as a cosmic-ray shield for interplanetary vehicles . . . it hasn't my name on it . . ."

"It will," said Jason.

"I think . . . I care less about that every year. It's a pleasure of growing old. Now—on the eighth day we began to build, using components from the old power plant. In the morgue and in the labs we set up here we had a microcosm within the microcosm of Sorrel Park. And confusion. Citizens descended on us in fury, parents screaming: Not my Joey! Not my Frankie! Not my —no, I wouldn't want to go through that again.

"We showed them. We had Old Foggy with second- and third-degree burns over fifty percent of skin area, and he died, eventually, without ever becoming lucid. Sergeant Fox—LaVonne shut him up for good, and he hasn't spoken since." He sighed. "The rage and fury we still have with us. But we simply, could, not, let those children go."

"So we worked quickly. The first Dump was a pre-fab barracks surrounded by barbed-wire immersed in the Field. It was es-

cape-proof even then. We laid them out in there with supplies of food and clothing and allowed them to waken. We felt they might be weak enough to be tractable. It was two weeks after the event by that time.

"We had Sorrel Park at our heels and we wanted them to know what we were up against, so we let them watch. Only adults."

"I saw it," said Jason painfully.

"It was not really a sight even for adults. Those children were growing stronger instead of weaker. They couldn't hurt anyone outside, but in two hours they reduced the installation to charred beams and twisted bed-springs.

"At least after that Sorrel Park began to understand. Our supplies of prefabs and bed-springs were limited, so Urquhart decided to use the classic method for subduing juvenile psychopaths. He left them alone in the mess. Luckily, it was a warm September. When they were crying from hunger we gave them a little food. When they cried for more, we gave them a little more . . . some of them were crying for their mothers . . . When it became too hard to sleep on the bare ground and they begged for beds, we told them we would give them whatever was necessary—but they must swear

not to harm whoever went in to give it to them. And they swore, for what their honor is worth . . . and that is roughly how it has been for eight years."

Jason touched a bruised cheek-bone. "Except sometimes they forget."

Shandy said, "It's odd: when you think of psi it looks so terrific, but when you think of the types that have it—"

"Yeah," said Jason, "but you better not let Prothero—ow!" He clapped a hand over his mouth.

"What—"

"Let my mind wander, dammit! Ouch, it's too late now!"

HE was right. Three sharp steps brought Prothero into the room. He was as extreme a mesomorph as Jason, and his shoulders filled the doorway. A clashing red complexion sometimes comes with ginger hair, and Prothero was in full clash.

"Why is that girl out of her room? Who's on duty here? Davy!"

Jason sighed, but his voice was calm and steady. "She's not unguarded, sir. Marsh and I have been keeping tab on her, and besides, she isn't trying to run away. Don't blame Davey. I bamboozled him."

"He shouldn't have allowed himself to be bamboozled," Prothero said coldly.

"It's all right, Steve," said

Marczinek gently. "I was only telling Shandy all about the horrors of the Dump, so she'll be good." He clicked his tongue, realizing suddenly that he had said the wrong thing, and Jason muttered under his breath. It seemed to Shandy that it would be impossible to find a right thing to say to Prothero.

But he only grunted, pulled out a khaki handkerchief and swabbed the back of his neck. The skin there was red and cross-hatched; it puckered under his touch. He was very nearly an old man. He sat on the bed and put his hand on Jason's shoulder. "How are you, boy?"

"I'm okay, thank you, sir."

"Who was responsible for the brannigan last night?"

"The Kingfish started it, but most of the others chimed in."

"Anybody try to stop it?"

"Not much anybody can do when a lot of them get together on a thing."

"Any change in the status quo?"

"I think the Kingfish'll try taking over from Quimper, soon. They're spoiling for a fight."

"I'll stop that." He rubbed his hard jaw. The fingers rasped faintly over microscopic stubble. He stood up to go, adding harshly, "Have to have a talk with somebody from in there."

Marczinek said, "Steve, sit down a minute." He took a deep

breath. "Jason, will you please tell Colonel Prothero—and me too—honestly and unequivocally whether Colin had anything to do with this mess?"

"No," said Jason immediately. "He did join in after a while when most of the others were in it, but he wasn't anywhere near starting it."

Prothero said wearily, "All right, I believe you. Just don't be so damn careful about sparing my feelings next time—only there won't be a next time." He turned to Shandy. "Now. What do I do about you?"

"I only wanted to find things out, sir. Why I'm here . . ."

He blinked and rubbed eyes reddened with sleeplessness. "Yeh. I guess that's not the worst thing in the world. Urquhart says an Imper's the kind of talent we need to help control the Dump, but don't ask me how he expects to do it." He stood up. "And why I'm here, in the big garbage heap . . . thirty years . . . a nice new shiny lieutenant playing a game of blues-and-greys around the power plant. Then bang! blooey! and we had real blood and real dead men to play with. Broke out geiger-counters and dickey-suits, and yanked volunteers out of the county jail." He pointed out the window where antennas glittered under the morning sun. "Those volunteers were their fathers.

And they're dead. General Kirsch too . . . Colonel Paterson.

"We cleaned it up, whoever was left of us; we got over the sickness. All I could think of afterwards was, thank God! thank God we're still alive. Yeah, thank God." He turned on his heel and went out, and they heard him bellowing down the hall, "Davey!"

Shandy hissed. "Jason! You're not going to let him chew out the poor guy for nothing! Quick! Do something!"

Yawning, Jason stretched out under the covers and folded his arms in back of his head. "Something for who?"

"Davey, you nut!" -

"Oh," he yawned again, "I already done that. I knocked off his hangover."

5.

URQUHART rattled papers on his desk and glanced across at Shandy, who was staring out the window. They were in his office after a supper she had shared with him and the others in a small dining-room. "What's the matter, Shandy? Why so moody? You're not cooped up in your room any more, and I thought you'd be happy about it."

"I'm still not free." She kept looking out at the evening sky.

"Do we have to go through all that stuff again, like yesterday?"

"Nope. Different stuff every day. Are you scared I'm going to ask you searching questions about the bootlegging business?" She hunched her shoulders. "Ah, Shandy, you think we'd pull them in and lay charges on the strength of what you'd say? We're not civvies here!"

She turned back to him with a set face. "They were all I had for ten years . . . you didn't get anything new from me."

"No, and I didn't want anything of that kind from you. It's not my business."

"What do you want, then?" she whispered.

"Your mainspring, Shandy! Only the shape of your living spirit. And you're sitting there all shrivelled up looking like an old maid who's just discovered the Oedipus complex."

She smiled in spite of herself. "I haven't got one."

"How old did you say you were when your parents died—about three and a half? From what you seem to have remembered up to that time I'd say you had a fully developed personality by then, so I wouldn't count on your not having one. But it's something everybody has, like a navel, nothing to worry about. Trust me. The tape-recorder's off; nobody

will know your private business."

"Jason knows everything," she said.

"Does it matter?" He took off his glasses and whirled them by one earpiece. "I imagine Jason has his secrets too . . . and if I know anything that shouldn't be told I'm not telling it. To you or anyone else. All right, I know you weren't asking!" He grinned. "Are you the same person I was talking to yesterday? I could have cheerfully wrung your neck then. Not the picture of a good psychiatrist. Now I've calmed down and you're flaring up. Why?"

"I was playing a game yesterday."

"Then why have you stopped playing?"

She looked out the window again. The sky was dark, and noise rose from the Dump, a wilderness of sound. "I have some of the same feelings they do. If there's bars around you, you feel you have a right to try to squeeze through them, and if there's guards in front of you, you have to outwit them. Doesn't matter how much people feel they have a right to put you there. From your point of view they have no right at all. Ever.

"I saw Ma Slippec beaten up. And you dragged me here. It didn't seem to me there was much choice between you and the civ-

vies. But last night, Jason—and he doesn't have to be here. I and the rest of Sorrel Park are stuck, but he could use psi and get out. And he's here." She faced his intent eyes again. "You came of your own will, and Marczinek too. You've all suffered for it: you, Marczinek, Prothero—nobody's been able to duck it. And the reason and shape of it underneath the surface is something I've got to learn yet."

"That's the only reason?"

"I'm interested in my future! My guess is you want the Dumplings handled by somebody they can't use psi on, who can't read their minds either—kind of a supplement for Jason. It's what you wanted me fer, isn't it? So maybe they'd get to trust me, and so on? But I'll tell you it doesn't sound like a workable idea to me."

"It was the general intention, though," said Urquhart.

"Okey-doke. It's kind of a scary idea, but let's forget that for the minute. I'll even forget you aren't giving me much choice."

"It's magnanimous of you."

"But if the Sore's going to be opened up you need help right now, for four or five years from now. And you said I'm too young. If I'm no use soon, when you need help so badly, will you keep me on indefinitely and train me?"

Urquhart put his glasses back on and folded his arms. "No.

We'll have to let you go, then."

"That's what I thought! And look what you're doing: you're trying to scrape me down to the raw. It hurts me to see Jason beat up, Dr. Marczinek with his family outside, Prothero . . . and then you have to know what makes me tick—and I like talking to you, I never had anybody to talk to. I used to get all my emotions from books, and I never thought I had any of my own, so nothing bothered me.

"If I stay around here for a couple of months and then go out there again I'll be a fish out of water and get picked up by the civvies and end up in Juvenile Detention scrubbing floors with some scruffy old bag yelling in my ear and waving a billy around my head."

Gnawing his lip, Urquhart twirled his chair round once, and said finally, "Shandy . . . we don't have sinecures around this place. But we care—for everybody, in the Dump or out. I can't make fancy promises, but I can say that much . . . and Shandy," he added gently, "you've only been here two days and the armor's crumbling. It seems your ideas of what you are and what you ought to be are tremendously different from what you really are . . . don't you want to find out?"

"Yes." She snuffled and rubbed a hand under her nose.

"Then you'd better throw away the armor. You don't want to keep up your membership in the Bootlegger's Association; it's not a going concern. Have you decided what you're going to do when you grow up?"

"Get out of Sorrel Park."

He smiled. "That's all right to start with."

"After that it depends on what kind of person I turn out to be."

"I think you've a much better chance to find that out now. But don't be afraid of being vulnerable. Out there—" he nodded toward the window, "—nobody's been able to hurt them—to reach the deep center of their emotions . . . and look where they are."

NEXT morning, savoring her limited freedom, she found the library. The small booklined room was as uncomfortable as the rest of the building. Two-thirds of its shelves were stuffed with discards from public and lending libraries, donated for the edification of the military and cringing in faded covers with titles flat as stale beer. The remaining third had been brought in by Urquhart, Marczinek, and Grace Halsey. She could have continued her study of Rorschach's test, but instead she pulled down books indiscriminately.

She skimmed and leafed quickly, sitting on a hard chair (there was no other kind), heels on,

rung, elbows on thighs, head on hands, as intently as she had exercised her intellectual suction pump for years on illegally borrowed books at midnight in the small back room above the cigar-store: about Jimmy Valentine, Burstad's first landing on Mars, a day at the seashore spent by a dreadfully sweet little girl name Honeybunch, a Welsh town by Milk Wood, complicated abdominal operations beginning invariably with a midsection down the midline, distant nebulae, the ragged men waiting for Godot—and Jason stuck his head through the doorway and yelled that it was time for lunch.

After lunch she picked up Klinghoffer's *Chemical Psychotherapy*, hefted it thoughtfully, and put it down; she had caught sight of Urquhart's collection on criminal anthropology.

She ploughed in, skimming tables of statistically significant percentages, and slowly began to build up a picture of Delinquent X, the bad boy in the street.

X was occasionally a girl, but much more often a boy; growing out from crowded and dirty tenements, though at odd times he came from surprising places and ended up in tenements. A father drunk or deserted, a mother more careless than evil; hampered more by dislike of education than by lack of intelligence. A muscular, tapering, rough-cast body,

strong and vital, the ideal of the artist and the girl in the street—it belonged to a boy who was restless, irritable, childish: he seriously intended to be a mountaineer, space-pilot, bullfighter when he grew up—if he could do it without hard work. He ran with birds of a feather, and more gracefully than the gangling bookish boy or the cheerful fatso. He wanted things on the minute, and was ready to take them, whatever got broken or who got hurt when he did it: serve them right, because everybody was against him anyway. But he was going to be something big: maybe a hero, maybe a gangster.

But this was not his future; not to be the giant of crime and destruction—a different breed—but the miserable inadequate, the petty criminal shuffling in and out of court and jail with his record hung round his neck like an albatross—an organism of the disease and challenge of Man.

SHANDY put the books aside and rested cheekbones on knuckles. There was something missing in the picture: X had no face. She thought of the groups she had seen over the years at Jake's and Fitch's Joint and all the other joints. The back-room types were usually hurried and furtive workingmen, but there were also clumps of kids who worked off the evening on a cup

of coffee and a dollar in the jukebox, eyeing the back door enviously. They were noisy, sometimes scuffling, wore fantastic clothes and had plenty of greasy hair growing way down the neck—but their faces were blurs. That was natural, because they were all so much alike; but that told her nothing about the Dumplings.

There were two good ways of finding out what she wanted to know. One was to go into the Dump, an idea she rejected out of hand; the other was to get a look at the Dump files . . . and the Dump files were in Prothero's office.

Ha.

Colonel Prothero, I'd like to see the Dump files, please.

Certainly, dear. Just pull out the drawer marked D.

She giggled. It was a delightful picture. Well, she could ask Urquhart, or Jason . . . but even if they approved she suspected they would want Prothero to approve as well.

. . . But if she went in unnoticed, and took them . . .

* * *

At supper she was mooning out the window, vaguely conscious of the pleasure of being able to see grass and flowers while she ate.

"For the third time, Shandy," Urquhart said, "will you please pass the butter?"

"What — oh, I'm sorry."

"What were you reading today that's made you so absentminded?"

"All sorts of stuff—but I was thinking about humors."

"Hm?"

"You know, the old idea that your character depended on what kind of liquid you had most of in your body: blood, bile, or phlegm. And you turned out sanguine-humored, or choleric or phlegmatic. Or else it depended on which planet was in the ascendant when you were born, and that made you saturnine or jovial or mercurial. I don't know if the two systems were supposed to work in the same person at once."

"What are you applying them to?"

"Well, you're using the work of Sheldon, the Gluecks, Kaplan-ski, Cosgrove and the rest to classify every kid in Sorrel Park by body types: endomorph, mesomorph, ectomorph, or mixtures. That's saying their characters depend on whether they are mostly fat, or muscular, or skinny, and—"

"Hold on, you're going too fast. Personality and temperament may depend to some extent on body types, but nobody said anything about character. Endomorphs are fat and love food and affection; mesomorphs are muscular and vigorous—and sometimes pushy; ectomorphs are

lanky and have a sensitivity that might have something to do with the relationship between skin surface and body mass. Those categories are extremes, of course, and though his shape might add to the factors developing a person's character, no type has an edge on brains or morals."

"Well, however you put it, it all sounds like astrology sometimes."

"Not when you find that almost eighty percent of the kids in the Dump are almost pure mesomorph. If we put every mesomorph in the country in reform school it would be silly—and dangerous. But if you measure all the kids in reform school and find eighty percent are mesomorphs, it's not."

"But kids in reform school are not eighty percent mesomorph. Only a big enough percentage to set people thinking."

Urquhart smiled. "You're right. I got off the deep end there. But here in Sorrel Park we've skimmed off the cream—" the cream jug rose from the table and set itself into Jason's hand without a ripple—"or rather, the psi skimmed it for us . . . well, if we ever get to open this place up, it ought to be a hive of scientific interest—but I don't think I'm going to hang around and watch it buzz." He turned to Prothero. "When are you leaving, Steve?"

Prothero gulped a mouthful of cake. "Tomorrow." He tossed down his last half-cup of coffee. "Excuse me. Got some things to do first."

"Where's he going?" Shandy asked.

"Washington, by helicopter," said Jason.

She looked at their glum faces. "What's the matter?"

"He's going to talk about the Grand Opening."

Urquhart added, "We've got a few private doubts about whether the world and Sorrel Park are ready for each other."

"You mean, about the Dump?"

"Partly. But is Sorrel Park ready to go back on thermonuclear power? For twenty-two years we've been the only place in the country operating a steam power plant. Is the world ready to learn what can happen when a thermonuclear plant blows up? What about municipal government? Sorrel Park's been hidden for thirty years, and has the laws and morals of a frontier town of a hundred and fifty years back. Also, there're seventy-five lawsuits against the plant sitting in the books waiting for the day when they can get to federal court—most of the plaintiffs are dead—think of sorting out the descendants! And this isn't counting the Dump, the publicity, and the fooferaw in every country in the world."

"But Prothero seems—'"
"Oh yeah," they brushed themselves off and stood up, "he's for it, all right. It's his baby."

IT put a different complexion on things. She was repelled by the idea of going after the files while Prothero was away. He had trusted her enough to allow her the run of the place. If she took them and was caught it would be bad enough with Prothero here; but if he was away, and some officious lieutenant had a report ready for him—not that she was afraid of Prothero, but . . . It looked as if she would have to ask him. If she were going to be useful there were things she had to know, and she might as well learn them honestly.

Jason walked down the hall with her. "What have you got planned for this evening? more reading?"

"I don't know," she said guiltily. It was on the tip of her tongue to ask if he thought Prothero would let her look at the files. And it was becoming harder and harder to visualize Prothero letting a kid mess around in his file-drawers. And Jason would laugh at her. Don't be afraid of being vulnerable, Urquhart had said. Sure, but she'd seen him when he wasn't too keen on being vulnerable.

Jason was looking at her closely. She was able to read his mind

for once: he was wishing he could read hers. "You up to mischief?"

"N-no . . . no mischief." She noticed his clothes for the first time. "What are you doing in uniform?" He was very much of a young Prothero in tans.

"I'm in the army," he said. "I'm of age . . . but I've always worn it since I've been here."

"How long?"

"Four years." He grinned. "Those crazy shirts are all right for Marczinek. He could wear a monkey-suit and still look like a professor."

She looked down at her long narrow shape and said wistfully, "I'd like to wear dresses, but I don't think they'd look any better on me than this stuff."

"You'll just have to put on some years, Shandy . . . I'm going to visit my folks now."

"I didn't know you had any."

"My parents and a sister . . ." He seemed a little embarrassed, as if, having given up all other privacies, he wanted to keep one intact. She would never ask how or if he managed to protect his family from his own stigma—but she wondered.

"Well," he said, "so long," and disappeared. Now he would be outside the barbed-wire . . . and home. She sighed and wandered down along the hall.

She stopped at Prothero's office, heart quickening. The

door was open, no-one was inside. She slipped in. The door was open as well to the other small room where she had seen the men bringing Jason. Both rooms were accessible to the hall, but the

the consciousness of her own nobility.

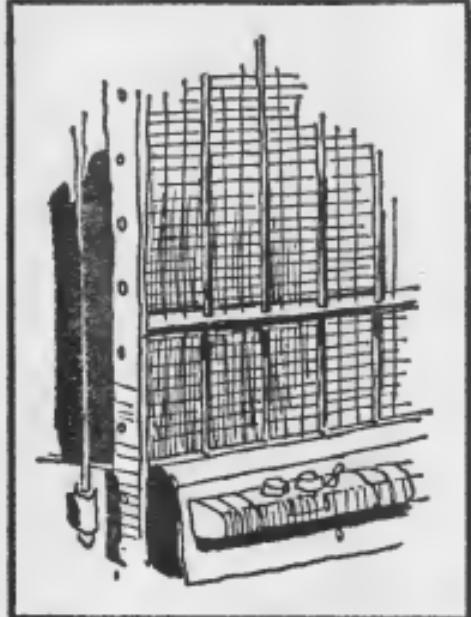
Then she heard murmuring and footsteps; clattering and the crunch of wheels on gravel. Prothero's voice called, "All right! In here!"

Her nerve failed her in an instant. She turned wildly toward the doorway, but there were noises in the hall too. She dashed into the next room; there was a dark figure at the door. Someone had taken up a post there. She crouched down and squeezed into a shadow beside the couch. Prothero turned on the light in his office, and she got a good look at what the men were wheeling into the room.

It was a cage of heavy wire mesh, so swathed in knobs, rods, wires, dials, antennas and aerials that it was almost opaque. But there was something huddled inside it.

"I don't need you now," Prothero told the men. He moved into the doorway. There was an unlit cigar in his mouth. Fire flamed between his hands and he bent to suck it, his face scarlet in the light, but expressionless. He pulled a chair over near the cage and straddled it, resting his arms on the back, and waiting.

After a few moments the cage creaked and stirred, and the thing inside it sat up and stretched. It was a boy, as undistinguishable as the X Shandy



office also led to the outside, and a waft of sweet evening air blew in through the screendoor.

She looked around, and for the first time felt guilty at being where she shouldn't. Desk, chairs, hatrack with army cap—and filing-cabinets. Here was the perfect opportunity; but she screwed up her courage, sat down on a chair, and scrunched her hands together in her lap. She was almost too scared to laugh at

had found in the books. He was no older than Jason: his fair hair was thick and wild, pushed back rather than combed; his face was smudged with dirt. There was a light beard growing on his chin, or perhaps only more dirt. Prothero did not look at him; he sat puffing on the cigar.

The boy folded his arms around his knees and said with perfect good humor, "Hell, Pop, you didn't have to use the stungun on me. You know I'm a good boy."

Without turning his head Prothero said, "Stand up!"

The good humor faded and the boy stood up sullenly. Shandy saw that he was dressed in the classic prisoner-of-war uniform: a grey coverall with a red target on the chest. Here it must have been worn with a sense of irony; no bullet would hit an escaped Dumpling.

"What do you want?" said Colin Prothero. He added, "I'm not a mind-reader," and grinned; the cage was evidently a small Field.

"Aah, you know," said Prothero wearily. Perhaps he had been through this a thousand times before. He reached back to knock a block of ash into a tray and turned to the boy again.

Colin twined his fingers in the mesh. "You know I didn't have anything to do with that branigan over your peeper."

"I know," said Prothero. He

turned the cigar in his fingers and watched the red flaming through layers of grey.

"You always said I never had enough guts anyway."

"I didn't say that."

"You thought it."

"You should have kept out of my mind, then . . . and proved to me—"

Colin sneered. "What? That I had enough guts to jump Jason Hemmer?"

"No . . . just that you were a person. Not especially a hero—just a human being. With the psi or not."

"I don't know what you mean."

"You know what I mean. You've had eighteen years to prove you're a person. You didn't start the row. You didn't join in right away. And you didn't try to stop it."

"You nuts? You figure I'm gonna help him?"

Prothero looked at him levelly. "No," he sighed. "Maybe I would have respected you more if you did start it. I don't know."

The boy laughed. "Great! Now I'm a slob because I *didn't* do anything dirty. If I'd started it you'd have pulled my ears off, eh? Look!" He pounded his fist against the mesh and the cage trembled. "Look, Pop! I'm not scared of you! You're scared of me, or you wouldn't have me here in a cage—"

Prothero snapped: "You're in

a cage because you're an animal! . . . You're in this room because you're my son. I know about Quimper and the Kingfish—but a toothache's no excuse for them to turn you all into wild bulls with banderills in your backs . . . I know them. They think they've got plans to fight it out. It's not going to happen—and I'll deal with them separately." His voice changed and shaded almost imperceptibly. "I brought you here because I hope . . . I want—"

Colin screamed, clutching the wires with both hands "I don't care what you want! You want! You want me to snivel and cry and lick your boots and be your little soldier-boy! You can go to hell! I want to be out of here, back there! I'd rather die in the Dump than live in the same world with you!"

Shandy writhed in her corner of shadow. She had grown more uncomfortable by the second, and now she was wishing with all her heart that she had braved Prothero's initial fury and made an escape. She glanced toward the

door, but the guard had not moved. Perhaps he had grown used to this.

Prothero had stood up. He took the chair by its back and threw it against the wall. The cigar rolled on the floor, scattering ash and streaming thinly with smoke.

"I'll break you!" he whispered.
"I'll break you!"

Colin laughed.

"Tapley! Get this thing out of here!"

He turned away as the cage was wheeled out, until it began to crunch on the gravel. He righted the chair slowly. Under his hand it shook in its loosened joints. He picked up the cigar, set it in his cheek-pouch, and absently scuffed at a burned spot on the floor.

He swung into the dark room, snapped the light on, and went over to the sink. His eyes were blank, almost blind. He opened the mirrored door and took out a bottle of branded whiskey and a glass. Then he turned and saw her.

Continued Next Month



The Time of Great Dying

By BEN BOVA

Many theories have been adduced for the disappearance of the dinosaurs from the earth.

Ben Bova deflates them, then puts forth one of his own that centers about a blade of grass.

MANY writers, both of science fiction and mainstream literature, have foreseen the end of man's civilization, or even of man himself, in a nuclear holocaust. But imagine a catastrophe that scours the Earth clean of every major life form! Imagine an Earth devoid not merely of man, but of elephants, bears, whales, horses, monkeys, apes, pigs, antelopes, cats, dogs—leaving nothing larger than the kangaroo to roam an emptied world.

Staggering? Yet a catastrophe similar to this happened about 70 million years ago when every

major and many minor life forms were wiped out. The mighty dinosaurs, rulers of the Earth for more than 100 million years, were the most spectacular victims of the cataclysm. But they were not alone in extinction. Large and small, on land, sea and air, the most complex and well-adapted plants and animals that two billion years of evolution could produce were suddenly and ruthlessly destroyed. Paleontologists have called this period of the Earth's pre-history "The Time of Great Dying."

Geological time is measured in

millions of years. Yet the Time of Great Dying occurred so quickly that modern scientists are almost as bewildered by its speed as by its thoroughness. On the geological time scale, the catastrophe of 70 million years ago happened almost overnight.

Lords of the Mesozoic

TO understand fully the magnitude of the problem, let's review briefly the history of the Mesozoic Era, the 125-million-year-long Age of Reptiles. It began, as many of Earth's great geological Eras did, in an Ice Age. Large areas of the planet were covered with sheets of glaciers. Prior to this onset of ice, more than 200 million years ago, the land was inhabited only by insects, arachnids (spiders, etc.) and amphibians—forerunners of our modern frogs, toads, salamanders.

The reptiles evolved early in the Mesozoic. Their rise was triggered by two major evolutionary breakthroughs. First, they developed an egg that could be laid on dry land. Reptile eggs have a tough leathery skin that holds moisture inside them. They do not have to be kept in water, as amphibian eggs must. Second, the reptiles developed tough, scaly skins that did not need to be always kept moist. They could live in dry climates, unlike the amphibians, which must remain

near water even in adult stages. The reptiles, then, developed the ability to conquer the land masses of Earth. While doing it, they produced some truly spectacular types of animal. Every schoolboy can recognize the gigantic Brontosaurus, the "Thunder Lizard" that weighed some 35 tons. A lesser known dinosaur, Brachiosaurus, was even bigger—weighing in at 50 tons, with the top of his crested head standing about 40 feet above the ground. These immense four-footed dinosaurs roamed the swamps of the world toward the middle of the Mesozoic Era. They were not, as many people mistakenly believe, the end-point of the dinosaur evolution. The biggest dinosaurs, certainly. But far from the last.

The Thunder Lizard and his huge cousins evolved in a world that probably had a tropical climate nearly from pole to pole. The Ice Age that ushered in the Mesozoic had ended, and for more than 50 million years an unbroken tropical summer ruled most (if not all) of the Earth. The vegetation of that lush age was unlike the jungles we know today. Ferns and horsetails were in abundance, as were tall, leaf-crowned plants that somewhat resembled modern palms. Precursors of the modern pine and cypress, and the giant sequoia, were the only true trees. Toward



the middle of the Mesozoic the climate cooled somewhat. New types of plants began to appear. More familiar trees, such as the fir, pine and magnolia, began to replace some of the tropical vegetation. The gigantic Thunder Lizards vanished completely. But the dinosaurs were not yet stopped. In fact, they produced some of their sturdiest types in this latter half of the Mesozoic Era.

While the planet-wide tropical summer ended, most of the world was still quite warm—sub-tropical, perhaps. During this period, the terrifying *Tyrannosaurus rex* and the massive, horned *Triceratops* took command of the land for some 70 million years. Moreover, giant reptiles invaded the seas and air. Pterosaurs flapped through the skies of the late Mesozoic, and sea-going dinosaurs—real sea serpents—combed the seas. There were probably as many distinct species of reptiles then as there are mammals today.

And then, almost as suddenly as the closing of a book, the reptiles were wiped out. The dinosaurs were extinguished completely, as were their flying and swimming cohorts. Of all the thousands of types of reptiles, only a pitiful handful of snakes, lizards, turtles and crocodilians survived to modern times.* Why?

THIS vast mystery is more than an intellectual exercise for the scientists who puzzle over it. At the heart of the matter is a basic question: are living species (including intelligent ones) destined to live out a certain span on Earth and then succumb to forces beyond their control? Are there limiting factors to the life span of a species? Will man someday become extinct, simply because he has "served his time," and has lost some vital something that makes a race go onward through time? The answers to these questions (if there are any) may well be locked up in the mystery of the dinosaurs, and the Time of Great Dying.

There is no dearth of theories on what caused the dinosaurs' extinction. The three most popular ones are: climate change, racial "old age," and competition from other life forms—particularly the mammals. Many others have been proposed. An interesting new idea came from the realm of astronomy: a stellar explosion was postulated as showering the Earth with lethal radiation, thereby triggering the Great Dying. There is another

* One other survivor, the Tuatara of New Zealand, is among the rarest of animals today. The Tuatara actually predates dinosaurs and is the direct descendent of the Rhynchocephalian (rink-o-sef-AH-yan), a primitive reptile that first appeared very early in the Mesozoic. The Tuatara bears about the same relationship to the dinosaurs as the duck-billed platypus does to modern mammals.

idea, charming in its simplicity, and backed by some evidence, that—as far as I know—has never been proposed elsewhere. For reasons of dramatic suspense, I choose to leave this idea until the end of the story.

The Changing Climate

THE end of the Mesozoic Era was a well-marked event, even though it lasted for several million years. The Earth went into one of its periodic upheavals and thrust up new mountain chains, the Rockies and Andes among them. "Thrust" is actually too vivid a word to use for a process that took thousands of millenia to complete. But, to put it baldly, many regions of the Earth that had been low, flat, and perhaps swampy became tilted or uplifted at the end of the Mesozoic. Volcanic activity is still prevalent in the Rockies and Andes, and even more so among the other mountain chains that ring the Pacific. During the period of their youth, these mountains must have spewed fire and ashes in great quantities.

The rise of new mountain chains must have interfered, too, with existing wind patterns, and caused widespread changes in weather and climate. Great increases in the amount of volcanic dust in the atmosphere would tend to make for cooler climate,

and more precipitation. From fossil evidence available scientists have deduced that the climate did indeed turn cooler at the end of the Mesozoic. And the very shapes of the continents—the patterns of land masses and oceans—changed considerably. The great inland sea that covered what is now the Midwestern United States, for example, gradually disappeared.

With the cooler climate came changes in plant life. Grasses and true flowering plants appeared for the first time. Modern trees evolved and spread over the world. The lush swamp vegetation of the middle Mesozoic vanished completely.

These climatic changes at the end of the Mesozoic Era are regarded by many serious students as sufficient explanation of the dinosaurs' extinction. Since the dinosaurs were reptiles, the reasoning goes, they could not control their body temperatures. The cooler climate made them sluggish—so slow that they could not feed themselves, or defend themselves against predators. Although the climate was still far from what we warm-blooded mammals would call chilly, the dinosaurs—in this view—"froze" to death.

Perhaps so. But the picture is not so simple.

For one thing, the change in climate at the end of the Meso-

zoic was far from a drastic one. Palm trees grew in Greenland and Patagonia for several million years after the dinosaurs became extinct. There was no new Ice Age. Quite the contrary: if we could be transported back some 70 million years, we would find the world climate considerably warmer than ours of the Twentieth Century. Today, we are still in the tail end of the last (but perhaps not final) glaciation of an Ice Age that has racked the world for the past 750,000 years or so.

No, the climate change at the end of the Mesozoic was probably not much more severe than the change in climate in the middle of the Mesozoic. As we saw, that change marked the end of the gigantic Thunder-type dinosaurs—but not the end of the whole race. Not the end of thousands of species of plant and animal life on land, sea and air. The dinosaurs met that change in climate by evolving new types. Why did they fail when a similar challenge presented itself?

And even though reptiles cannot control their body temperatures, modern lizards and snakes can and do survive in Alaska and northern Europe, and even in the high Himalayas. They hibernate during the coldest part of the year, but they survive. Why didn't the sturdy Tyrannosaur, or Triceratops? Their large sizes

would have fitted them even better for cooler climates than the tiny modern reptiles, since a large animal has more internal volume to skin surface area than a small one, and therefore should radiate away his body heat more slowly.

Climate change alone cannot account for death of the dinosaurs.

Racial Senescence

SENESCENCE is a dignified term for old age, and the gist of the "racial senescence" argument is that the dinosaurs—as a whole—simply became too old and tired to adapt anew to a changing world. Remember, by the time the Mesozoic drew to a close, the dinosaurs had been ruling the Earth for some 100 million years—more than 100 times the length of time man has even existed as a species on Earth.

A few paragraphs ago we commented on the fact that the dinosaurs survived a climate change in the middle Mesozoic, but succumbed at the end of the Era. The argument of racial senescence claims that the dinosaurs still had the drive to survive when the first challenge confronted them, but had outgrown the will to live when the next climate change hit them. This is an argument that is difficult both to prove and to rebut. What constitutes racial old age?

Tired genes? Unfavorable mutations?

Dinosaurs did evolve many weird and perhaps overspecialized types toward the end of the Mesozoic. But just as beauty is in the beholder's eye, what seems weird and overspecialized to us may have been quite practical 70 million years ago or more. We just do not know enough to say with certainty that Triceratops' three horns were an unnecessary overspecialization that eventually led to his extinction.

An offshoot of the racial senescence theory is the possibility that the dinosaurs fell victim to some plague that suddenly and ferociously destroyed them. Again, this is an answer that answers nothing, for it cannot be proved or disproved. But would such a plague affect thousands of different species of animals and plants, on land, sea and air?

Competition from Mammals

PERHAPS the dinosaurs were simply "muscled out" by the newly-arising mammals. The mammals, although no larger than medium-sized dogs by the end of the Mesozoic, had several evolutionary advantages in their favor. First, of course, they had control of their body temperature. This meant that they could be active when it was too cool or too hot for the reptilians to do anything but doze. Second, the

mammals had from the outset brains that widely outclassed the dinosaurs'. Mighty Brontosaurus, for all his 35 tons, had a brain smaller than that of a modern kitten. Smaller, and far less bright.

The little mammals, living in the shadow of Tyrannosaurs and such, might have simply competed their large-size opponents into extinction. After all, even in the semi-tropical paradise of the late Mesozoic, there was only so much food to go around. If the mammals were quicker and smarter, the gigantic but dimwitted dinosaurs might have literally starved to death.

An interesting theory, and a highly flattering one, since we are mammals ourselves. But there are some weak points. For one thing, there were mammals (or at least, protomammals) through much of the Mesozoic. Why did they not compete the dinosaurs out of existence earlier? The fossil evidence seems to show that the mammals remained small and limited in numbers until after the Time of Great Dying. Once the dinosaurs were out of the way, the mammals inherited the Earth, and spread explosively in numbers and species until they covered the world. And, even if mammals did compete the dinosaurs into the ground, they could not pos-

sibly have also wiped out the flying and swimming reptiles, and the many plant forms that disappeared at the end of the Mesozoic.

A variant of the competition theory is that the insatiable flesh-eating dinosaurs, such as *Tyrannosaurus*, drove their fellow dinosaurs and themselves into extinction simply by killing dinosaurs at a faster rate than the beasts could reproduce themselves. This idea is usually coupled with the proposition that the little mammals were busily gorging themselves on dinosaur eggs—birth control with a vengeance!

Answers: Orthodox-and-Un-

WHILE none of the three theories discussed so far gives a completely satisfactory answer to the puzzle of the Time of Great Dying, they do present a picture that begins to make sense. We can see the mighty dinosaurs faced with a changing climate, with the inroads of the small but active mammals, and with the burdens of their own overdevelopment. But they are not the final answer. They do not explain the mystery in full. More information and more ideas are necessary.

One new idea came from Dr. Maurice M. Shapiro of the Naval Research Laboratory a few years ago. He suggested that perhaps lethal radiation from

the explosion of a nearby star may have caused the sudden demise of much of the Earth's higher life forms. It has been estimated that supernova explosions—the type of stellar blast that Shapiro envisions—occur in our galaxy on the average of once every 500 years. So there is certainly no lack of opportunity for such an event to happen around the Time of Great Dying. Supernovas emit tremendous energy: as much in one day as the Sun radiates in a million years. Some of this energy is in the form of gamma radiation, which is deadly to living tissue.

However, for the Earth to receive a high-enough dose of radiation to cause widespread dying, the supernova must have been comparatively close by in interstellar space. After all, supernova explosions took place in 1054, 1572, and 1604 with no noticeable effect on Earth. Within a radius of about 17 lightyears from the Sun there are five white dwarf stars—stars that have collapsed from their normal size and brightness and are slowly cooling off and heading for extinction. Astronomers believe that some, perhaps all, white dwarf stars are the result of supernova explosions. It could be, then, that one of these five was close enough, and exploded at the right time, to trigger the Time of Great Dying.

All of these white dwarf stars are much too dim to be seen with anything less than a large telescope. But two of them are members of double-star systems, and their companions in both cases are quite bright; Sirius and Procyon. In astronomical jargon, they are known as the Great Dog Star and the Lesser Dog Star; their dim companions are called the Pups. There is something poetically fitting about the extinction of a star causing the extinction of the dinosaurs. And either Sirius' or Procyon's Pup may well have exploded approximately 70 million years ago—the life histories of both stars deduced by astronomers show that the timing is certainly not impossible. But unless and until some solid evidence can be put together to support the idea, the supernova theory will remain nothing more than an interesting speculation.

Only science fictioneers would even dream about time travellers hunting the dinosaurs into extinction. But the idea of intelligent extraterrestrial life is gaining support among professional scientists. If you grant the possibility of intelligent creatures travelling among the stars, you might consider the theory that the dinosaurs were deliberately wiped out by extraterrestrial visitors. Why? Perhaps to allow the mammals a chance to multiply,

so that they might someday evolve an intelligent species. An unorthodox answer, of course, but it at least has (and has had!) the makings of an intriguing science fiction story!

Victory, not Defeat

ANOTHER new idea (at least, it's new to me) is that the Time of Great Dying may represent not so much a defeat for the old life forms of the Mesozoic as a victory for a new life form. No, I am not talking about the mammals. As we saw earlier, primitive mammals existed through much of the Mesozoic, and the mammals took command of the Earth only after the dinosaurs left the scene.

The new life form I have in mind is nothing spectacular or dramatic. It is quiet, common to the point of super-abundance, and used by nearly every human being almost every day of the year.

It is, in a word, grass.

Sounds strange, doesn't it? The lordly dinosaurs perished because of grass? Why? How? What's the evidence?

To begin with, few people realize how important a life form grass is. As John Christopher dramatically pointed out in his novel *No Blade of Grass*, grasses of one form or another make up the cereal grains that give most men their daily bread—and beer.

Grass is so common that most of us take it for granted (until we try to grow some on our lawns). Yet this very commonness should indicate how widespread and successful a life form the grasses really are.

Up to the end of the Mesozoic Era, this was certainly not the case. There were no grasses. They first appeared approximately at the end of the Mesozoic. The flowering of the grasses took place while the reptiles were dying out. Is this a coincidence? Very few events in nature are.

The thesis, then, is that the grasses appeared and dominated plant life as the Mesozoic Era waned. The tropical and semi-tropical vegetation on which the herbivorous dinosaurs fed quickly disappeared, and the dinosaurs could not adapt to the new diet. As the herbivores died off, the carnivores that fed on them had no choice but oblivion.

A neat thesis? Well, it fits in with the points that have already been established: the changing climate, the dinosaurs' apparent overspecializations, the inroads of the little mammals—who apparently took to grass as a prime foodstuff. I can even offer some additional evidence, although it is circumstantial evidence, at best. (As is practically everything we have discussed so far.)

A modern zoologist will tell you that eating grass isn't easy.

Compared to other types of vegetation, the grasses are coarse and abrasive. They are hard to chop off and hard to digest. Animals that make a steady diet of grass—the Ungulates, such as horses, cows, sheep, etc.—have had to make some special adaptations in their equipment for obtaining and digesting their food. The prime example is the teeth. Reptiles, dinosaurs included, have unspecialized teeth. Although they differ in size, reptile teeth are all like our own canine teeth. They are designed for grabbing something and holding it in the mouth. Modern reptiles cannot chew their food. Probably the dinosaurs couldn't, either.

Modern ungulates have highly specialized teeth. The front teeth, incisors, are usually chisel-shaped—designed for nipping off tough blades of grass. The molars are designed for thorough grinding operations, and very large, so that a lifetime of grinding will not wear them down to the point of uselessness and, therefore, starvation. Many species of ungulates have highly specialized digestive equipment, too. Witness the four-compartmented stomach of the cow. While fossil bones don't tell us much about the digestive tracts of the dinosaurs, we know that no modern reptile has digestive equipment half as complicated as a cow's.

All of which seems strongly to indicate that the victory of grass over easier-to-eat forms of vegetation spelled the ultimate defeat of the dinosaurs. Racial senescence need not be called on to explain the Time of Great Dying. The grasses could have taken over so quickly that the dinosaurs did not have the time to adapt, regardless of their racial age. The mammals, which already had begun to develop specialized teeth, capitalized on the situation.

But what happened to the flying and swimming reptiles? The flyers might well have been driven out of the air by the same combination of climate, competition, and changing food avail-

abilities that wiped out the dinosaurs. To the fate of the sea-going reptiles a new factor can be added: the uplifting of the land masses, which drained many of the shallow seas where these reptiles dwelled. It is likely that the deep ocean basins were never penetrated in great numbers by the "sea serpents."

The Time of Great Dying may not be strictly explainable, but at least we can postulate some causes and effects that seem half-way likely. There was nothing inevitable about it. The end of some forms of life was marked by the beginning of new forms. If and when it becomes man's turn, will there be new life forms to inherit the Earth?

COMING NEXT MONTH

The war was over—but it made little difference to the POWs who were imprisoned in the most fiendish jail ever devised: a self-contained bubble in space. The April AMAZING features Henry Slesar's tense and ingenious story, "Prisoner in Orbit."

In the same issue is Sam Moskowitz's SF Profile of the veteran galaxy-buster, E. E. Smith, creator of the famed Lensman and Skylark series. Also in the April AMAZING: the second part of Phyllis Gotlieb's novel, "Sunburst"; as many short stories as we can squeeze in; and our regular features. The April AMAZING goes on sale at your newsstand March 12.



NOW is FOREVER

By DOBBIN THORPE

In assessing the evils of technology, science fiction has been strangely derelict in its discussion of the spread of copying machines, reproducing machines. This story—of the Reprostat and the ultimate facsimile—changes all that.

CHARLES ARCHOLD liked the facade best at twilight. On June evenings like this (Was it June?), the sun would sink into the canyon of Maxwell Street and spotlight the sculptured group in the pediment: a full-breasted Commerce extended an allegorical cornucopia from which tum-

bled allegorical fruits into the outstretched hands of Industry, Labor, Transportation, Science, and Art. He was idling past (the Cadillac engine was beginning to misfire again, but where could you find a mechanic these days?), abstractedly considering the burning tip of his cigar,

Illustrated by
FINLAY





when he observed peripherally that Commerce had been beheaded. He stopped.

It was against the law; a defacement, an insult. Maxwell Street echoed the slam of the car door, his cry—"Police!" A swarm of pigeons rose from the feet of Industry, Labor, Transportation, Science, and Art and scattered into the depopulated streets. The bank president achieved a smile of chagrin, although there was no one in sight from whom he would have had to conceal his embarrassment. Archold's good manners, like his affluent paunch, had been long in forming and were difficult to efface.

Somewhere in the acoustical maze of the streets of the financial district Archold could hear the rumble of a procession of teenage Maenads approaching. Trumpets, drums, and screaming voices. Hurriedly, Archold locked his car and went up the bank steps. The bronze gates were open; the glass doors were unlocked. Drapes were drawn across the windows as they had been on the day, seven months earlier or thereabouts, when he and the three or four remaining staff members had closed the bank. In the gloom, Archold took inventory. The desks and office equipment had been piled into one corner; the carpets had been torn up from the parquet floor; the tellers' cages had been arranged

into a sort of platform against the back wall. Archold flicked on a light switch. A spotlight flooded the platform with a dim blue light. He saw the drums. The bank had been converted into a dancehall.

In the sub-basement, the air-conditioner rumbled into life. Machines seemed to live a life of their own. Archold walked, nervously aware of his footsteps on the naked parquet, to the service elevator behind the jerry-built bandstand. He pressed the UP button and waited. Dead, as a doornail. Well, you couldn't expect everything to work. He took the stairs up to the third floor. Passing through the still-plush reception room outside his office, he noticed that there were extra couches along the walls. An expensive postermural representing the diversified holding of the New York Exchange Bank had been ripped from the wall; a Gargantuan and ill-drawn pair of nudes reclined where the mural had been. Teenagers!

HIS office had not been broken into. A thick film of dust covered his bare desk. A spider had constructed (and long ago abandoned) a web across the entire expanse of his bookshelves. The dwarf tree that stood in a pot on the window sill (a present, two Christmases ago from his secretary) had shriveled into

a skeleton where, for a time, the spider had spun other webs. An early model Reprostat (of five years ago) stood beside the desk. Archold had never dared to smash the machine, though, God knew, he had wanted to often enough.

He wondered if it would still work, hoping, of course, that it would not. He pressed the Arch-type button for memo-pad. A sign flashed red on the control panel: INSUFFICIENT CARBON. So, it worked. The sign flashed again, insistently. Archold dug into one of his desk drawers for a bar of carbon and fed it into the hopper at the base of the Reprostat. The machine hummed and emitted a memo-pad.

Archold settled back in his own chair, raising a cloud of dust. He needed a drink or, lacking that (he drank too much, he remembered) a cigar. He'd dropped his last cigar in the street. If he were in the car, he could just touch a button, but here

Of course! His office Reprostat was also set to make his own brand of cigars. He pressed the cigar Archtype button; the machine hummed and emitted one Maduro cigar, evenly burning at its tip. How could you ever be angry with the machines? It wasn't their fault the world was in a shambles; it was the fault of people that misused the machines—greedy, short-sighted

people who didn't care what happened to the Economy or the Nation as long as they had Maine lobster every day and a full wine cellar and ermine stoles for a theatre opening and

But could you blame them? He had himself spent thirty years of his life to get exactly those things, or their equivalents, for himself—and for Nora. The difference was, he thought as he savored the usual aroma of his cigar (before the Reprostats, he had never been able to afford this brand. They had cost \$1.50 apiece, and he was a heavy smoker)—the difference was simply that some people (like Archold) could be trusted to have the best things in life without going haywire, while other people, the majority, in fact, could not be trusted to have things that they couldn't pay for with their own industry. It was now a case of too many cooks. Authority was disappearing; it had vanished. Morality was now going fast. Young people, he had been informed (when he still knew people who would tell him these things), didn't even bother to get married anymore—and their elders, who should have set them an example, didn't bother to get divorced.

Absent-mindedly, he pressed the Reprostat button for another cigar, while the one he had been smoking lay forgotten in

the dusty ashtray. He had argued with Nora that morning. They had both been feeling a little under the weather. Maybe they had been drinking again the night before—they had been drinking quite a lot lately—but he could not remember. The argument had taken a bad turn, with Nora poking fun (and her finger) at his flabby belly. He had reminded her that he had got his flabby belly working all those years at the bank to provide her with the house and her clothes and all the other expensive, obsolescing goodies she could not live without.

"Expensive!" she had screamed. "What's expensive anymore? Not even money is expensive."

"Is that *my* fault?"

"You're fifty years old, Charlie boy, *over* fifty, and I'm still young," (she was forty-two, to be exact) "and I don't have to keep you hanging around my neck like an albatross."

"The albatross was a symbol of guilt, my dear. Is there something you're trying to tell me?"

"I wish there was!"

He had slapped her, and she had locked herself in the bathroom. Then he had gone off for a drive, not really intending to come past the bank, but the force of habit had worked upon his absent-minded anger and brought him here.

THE office door edged open.
"Mr. Archold?"

"Who!—oh, Lester, come in. You gave me a start."

Lester Tinburley, the former janitor-in-chief of the Exchange Bank, shambled into the office, mumbling reverent how-do-you-do-sirs and nodding his head with such self effacing cordiality that he seemed to have palsy. Like his former superior (who wore a conservative grey suit, fresh that morning from the Reprostat), Lester wore the uniform of his old position: white-and-blue striped denim overalls, faded and thin from many launderings. The black peppercorn curls of his hair had been sheared down to shadowy nubbins. Except for some new wrinkles in the brown flesh of his face (scarcely noticed by Archold), Lester appeared to be in no way different from the janitor-in-chief that the bank president had always known.

"What's happened to the old place, Lester?"

Lester nodded his head sadly. "It's these kids—you can't do a thing with them nowadays. All of them gone straight to the devil—dancing and drinking and some other things I couldn't tell you, Mr. Archold."

Archold smiled a knowing smile. "You don't have to say another word, Lester. It's all because of the way they were

raised. No respect for authority—that's their problem. You can't tell them anything they don't know already."

"What's a person going to do, Mr. Archold?"

Archold had the answer even for that. "Discipline!"

Lester's palsy, as though Archold had given a cue, became more pronounced. "Well, I've done what I could to keep things up. I come back every day I can and look after things. Fix up what I can—what those kids don't smash up for their own fun. All the records are in the basement now."

"Good work. When things return to normal again, we'll have a much easier job, thanks to you. And I'll see that you get your back wages for all the time you've put in."

"Thank you, sir."

"Did you know that someone has broken the statue out in front? The one right over the door. Can't you fix it somehow, Lester. It looks just terrible."

"I'll see what I can do, sir."

"See that you do." It was a good feeling for Archold, giving orders again.

"It sure is good to have you back here, sir. After all these years. . . ."

"Seven months, Lester. That's all it's been. It does seem like years."

Lester glanced away from

Archold and fixed his gaze on the skeleton of the dwarf tree. "I've been keeping track with the calendars in the basement, Mr. Archold. The ones we stocked for '94. It's been two years and more. We closed April 12, 1993. . . ."

"A day I'll never forget, Lester."

". . . and this is June 30, 1995."

Archold looked puzzled. "You've gotten confused, boy. It couldn't be. It's . . . it is June, isn't it? That's funny. I could swear that yesterday was Oct. . . . I haven't been feeling well lately."

A muffled vibration crept into the room. Lester went to the door.

"Maybe you'd best leave now, Mr. Archold. Things have changed around the old bank. Maybe you wouldn't be safe here."

"This is my office, my bank. Don't tell me what to do!" His voice cracked with authority like a rusted trumpet.

"It's those kids. They come here every night now. I'll show you out through the basement."

"I'll leave the way I came, Lester. I think you'd better return to your work now. And fix that statue!"

Lester's palsy underwent a sudden cure, his lips tightened. Without another word or a look back, he left Archold's office. As soon as he found himself alone,

Archold pressed the Beverage, al-holic Archtype button on the Reprostat. He gulped down the iced Scotch greedily, threw the glass into the hopper and pressed the button again.

At midnight Jessy Holm was going to die, but at the moment she was deliriously happy. She was the sort of person that lives entirely in the present.

Now, as every light in the old Exchange Bank was doused (except for the blue spot on the drummer), she joined with the dancing crowd in a communal sigh of delight and dug her silvered fingernails into Jude's bare arm.

"Do you love me?" she whispered.

"Crazy!" Jude replied.

"How much?"

"Kid, I'd die for you." It was true.

A blat of static sounded from the speakers set into the gilded ceiling of the banking floor. In the blue haze about the bandstand, a figure swayed before the microphone. A voice of ambiguous gender began to sing along to the hard, rocking beat of the music—only noises it first seemed; gradually, a few words emerged:

Now, now, now, now—

Now is forever.

Around and around and around—

Up and down

And around and around—be-cause

Tonight is forever

And love, lo-o-ve is now.

"I don't want to stop, ever," Jessy shouted above the roar of the song and the tread of the dancers.

"It's never gonna stop, baby," Jude assured her. "C'mon let's go upstairs."

The second floor lobby was already filled with couples. On the third floor they found themselves alone. Jude lit cigarettes for himself and Jessy.

"It's scary here, Jude. We're all alone."

"That's not gonna last long. It's getting near ten o'clock."

"Are you scared—about later, I mean?"

"Nothing to be scared of. It doesn't hurt—maybe for just a second, then it's all over."

"Will you hold my hand?"

Jude smiled. "Sure, baby."

A shadow stepped out of the shadows. "Young man—it's me, Lester Tinburly. I helped you fix things downstairs if you remember."

"Sure, dad, but right now I'm busy."

"I only wanted to warn you that there's another man here—" Lester's voice diminished to a dry, inaudible whisper. "I think he's going to—" He wet his lips. "—to make some sort of trouble."

Lester pointed to the crack of

light under Archold's door. "Maybe you'd better get him out of the building."

"Jude—not now!"

"I'll only be a minute, baby. This could be fun." Jude looked at Lester. "Some sort of nut, huh?"

Lester nodded and retreated back into the shadow of the reception desk.

Jude pushed open the door and looked at the man who sat behind the dusty, glass-topped desk. He was old—maybe fifty—and bleary-eyed from drinking. A pushover. Jude smiled, as the man rose unsteadily to his feet.

"Get out of here!" the old man bellowed. "This is my bank. I won't have a bunch of tramps walking about in my bank."

"Hey, Jessy!" Jude called. "C'mere and getta look of this."

"Leave this room immediately. I am the president of this bank. I"

Jessy giggled. "Is he crazy, or what?"

"Jack," Jude shouted into the dark reception room, "is this guy on the level? About being bank president?"

"Yessir," Lester replied.

"Lester! Are you out there? Throw these juvenile delinquents out of my bank. This minute! Do you understand? Lester!"

"Didja hear the man, Lester? Why don't you answer the bank president?"

"He can open the vault doors. You can make him do it." Lester came to stand in the door and looked in triumph at Archold. "That's where all the money is—from the other banks too. He knows the combination. There's millions of dollars. He would never do it for me, but you can make him."

"Oh Jude—let's. It would be fun. I haven't seen money for just an age."

"We don't have the time, baby."

"So we'd die at two o'clock instead of twelve. What difference would it make? Just think—a bank vault crammed full of money! Please. . . ."

Archold had retreated to the corner of his office. "You can't make me. . . . I won't. . . ."

Jude began to seem more interested. He had no interest in money as such, but a contest of wills appealed to his forthright nature. "Yeah, we could toss it around like confetti—that would be something. Or build a bonfire!"

"No!" Lester gasped, then, palliatively—"I'll show you where the vault is, but a fire would burn down the bank. What would the people do tomorrow night? The vault is downstairs. I've got the keys for the cage around the vault, but he'll tell you the combination."

"Lester! No!"

"Call me 'boy' like you used to, Mr. Archold. Tell me what I've got to do."

Archold grasped at the straw. "Get those two out of here. Right now, Lester."

LESTER laughed. He went up to Archold's Reprostat and pressed the cigar Archtype button. He gave Jude the burning cigar. "This will make him tell you the combination." But Jude ignored Lester's advice, or seemed to. He threw away his cigarette and stuck Archold's cigar into the corner of his mouth, slightly discomposing his studied grin. Emboldened, Lester took a cigar for himself and followed this up with Scotchies for himself, Jessy, and Jude. Jude sipped at his meditatively, examining Archold. When he had finished, he grabbed the bank president by the collar of his jacket and led him down the stairs to the ballroom-banking-floor.

The dancers, most of whom were shortly to die like Jude and Jessy, were desperately, giddily gay. A sixteen-year-old girl lay unconscious at the foot of the bandstand. Jude dragged Archold up the steps and into the hazy blue light. Archold noticed that Mrs. Desmond's name placard still hung on the grill of the teller's window which now formed a balustrade for the bandstand.

Jude grabbed the mike. "Stop

the action." The entertainment committee has something new for all of us." The band stopped, the dancers turned to look at Jude and Archold. "Ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to introduce the president of this fine bank, Mr. — what - did - you - say your-name-was?"

"Archold," Lester volunteered from the dancefloor. "Charlie Archold."

"Mr. Archold is going to open up the bank vault special for tonight's little party, and were going to decorate the walls with good, old-fashioned dollar bills. We're going to roll in money—isn't that so, Charlie?"

Archold struggled to get loose from Jude's grip. The crowd began to laugh. "You'll pay for the damage you've done here," he moaned into the mike. "There are still laws for your kind. You can't. . . ."

"Hey, Jude," a girl yelled, "lemme dance with the old fellow. You only live once and I'm going to try everything." The laughter swelled. Archold could not make out any faces in the crowd below. The laughter seemed to issue from the walls and the floor, disembodied and unreal. The band began a slow, mocking fox trot. Archold felt himself gripped by a new set of hands. Jude let go of his collar.

"Move your feet, stupid. You can't dance standing still."

"Turn on the dizzy lights," Jessy shouted.

"You're forgetting the vaults," Lester whined at her. She took the old janitor in hand and led him up to the bandstand, where they watched Archold floundering in the arms of his tormentor.

The blue spotlight blanked out. The bank was suddenly filled with a swarm of bright red flashes, like the revolving lights mounted on police cars. That, in fact, had been their source. Klaxons sounded—someone had triggered the bank's own alarm system. A trumpet, then the drums, took up the klaxon's theme.

"Let me lead," the girl was shouting in Archold's ear. He saw her face in a brief flash of red light, cruel and avid, strangely reminiscent of Nora—but Nora was his wife and loved him—then felt himself being pushed back, his knees crumbling, over the grill, and down. The girl lying on the floor broke his fall.

There were gunshots. The police, he thought. Of course, there were no police. The boys were aiming at the spinning lights.

Archold felt himself lifted by dozens of hands. Lights spun around him overhead, and there was a brief explosion when one of the marksmen made a bullseye. The hands that bore him aloft began to pull in different directions, revolving him, cart-

wheel-fashion, in time to the klaxon's deafening music, faster and faster. He felt the back of his jacket begin to rip, then a wrenching pain in his shoulder. Another explosion of light.

HE fell to the floor with a shuddering pain through his whole body. He was drenched with water, lying at the door of the vault.

"Open it, dad," someone—not Jude—said.

Archold saw Lester in the forefront of the group. He raised his arm to strike at him, but the pain stopped him. He stood up and looked at the ring of adolescent faces around him. "I won't open it. That money does not belong to me. I'm responsible to the people who left it here; it's their money. I can't. . . ."

"Man, nobody is going to use that money anymore. Open it."

A girl stepped out from the crowd and crossed over to Archold. She wiped his forehead where it was bleeding. "You better do what they say," she said gently. "Almost all of them are going to kill themselves tonight, and they don't care what they do or who they hurt. Life is cheap—a couple bars of carbon and a few quarts of water—and the pieces of paper behind that door don't mean a thing. In one day, you could Reprostat a million dollars."

"No. I can't. I won't do it."

"Everybody—you too, Darline—get back here. We'll make him open it up." The main body of the crowd had already retreated behind the cage that fenced in the vault. Lester, of course, had had the keys to get them into the cage. Darline shrugged and joined the rest of them.

"Now, Mr. President, either you open that door or we'll start using you for a target."

"No!" Archold rushed to the combination lock. "I'll do it," he was screaming when one of the boys shot the glass-faced regulator above the lock.

"You hit him."

"I did not."

Darline went to look. "It was a heart attack, I guess. He's dead."

They left Lester alone in the outer room of the vault with Archold's body. He stared bleakly at the corpse. "I'll do it again," he said. "Again and again."

On the floor above them, the klaxons were quieted and the music began again, sweetly at first, then faster and louder. It was nearing midnight.

NO RA ARCHOLD, wife of Charles, was embarrassed by her red hair. Although it was her natural color, she suspected that people thought she dyed it. She was forty-two, after all, and so many older women decided to be redheads.

"I like it just the way it is, honey," Dewey told her. "You're being silly."

"Oh, Dewey, I'm so worried."

"There isn't anything to worry about. It's not as though you were leaving him—you know that."

"But it seems *wrong*."

Dewey laughed. Nora pouted, knowing that she looked becoming in a pout. He tried to kiss her, but she pushed him away and went on with her packing—one of a kind of everything she liked. The suitcase was more of a ceremonial gesture than a practical necessity: in one afternoon at the stores, she could have an entire wardrobe Reprostanted if she wanted to take the trouble (a kind of trouble she enjoyed taking). But she liked her old clothes—many of which were "originals." The difference between an original and a Reprostanted copy was undetectable even under an electron microscope, but Nora, nonetheless, felt a vague mistrust of the copies—as though they were somehow transparent to other eyes and shabbier.

"We were married twenty years ago, Charlie and me. You must have been just a little kid when I was already a married woman." Nora shook her head at woman's frailty. "And I don't even know your last name." This time she let Dewey kiss her.

"Hurry up, now," he whis-

pered. "The old boy will be back any minute."

"It's not fair to *her*," Nora complained. "She'll have to put up with all the horrible things I have all these years."

"Make up your mind. First you worry about him; now, it isn't fair for her. I'll tell you what—when I get home, I'll Reprostat another Galahad to rescue *her* from the old dragon."

Nora observed him suspiciously. "Is that your last name—Galahad?"

"Hurry up now," he commanded.

"I want you out of the house while I do it. I don't want you to see—the other one."

Dewey guffawed. "I'll bet not!" He carried the suitcase to the car and waited, while Nora watched him from the picture window. She looked about the living room once more regretfully. It was a beautiful house in one of the best suburbs. For twenty years it had been a part of her, rather the greater part. She didn't have any idea where Dewey wanted to take her. She was thrilled by her own infidelity, realizing at the same time that it made no difference. As Dewey had pointed out to her, life was cheap—a couple bars of carbon and a few quarts of water.

The clock on the wall read 12:30. She had to hurry.

In the Reprostating room, she

unlocked the Personal panel on the control board. It was meant only for emergencies, but it could be argued that this was an emergency. It had been Charles' idea to have his own body Archetyped by the Reprostat. His heart was bad; it could give out at any time, and a personal Archetype was better than life insurance. It was, in a way, almost immortality. Nora, naturally, had been Archetyped at the same time. That had been in October, seven months after the bank had closed, but it seemed like only yesterday. It was June already! With Dewey around, she'd be able to cut down on her drinking.

Nora pressed the button reading "Nora Archold." The sign on the control panel flashed: INSUFFICIENT PHOSPHOROUS. Nora went to the kitchen, dug into the cupboard drawers for the right jar, and deposited it in the hopper that had been set into the floor. The Reprostat whirred and clicked to a stop. Timidly, Nora opened the door of the materializer.

Nora Archold—herself—lay on the floor of the chamber in an insensible heap, in the same state that Nora (the older, unfaithful Nora) had been in when—that day in October—she had been archetyped. The elder Nora dragged her freshly Reprostanted double into the bedroom. She considered leaving a note that would

explain what had happened—why Nora was leaving with a stranger she had met only that afternoon. But, outside the house, Dewey was honking. Tenderly, she kissed the insensible woman who lay in her own bed and left the house where she had felt, for twenty years, a prisoner.

*Fair youth, beneath the trees,
thou canst not leave
Thy song, nor even can those
trees be bare.*

"Afraid?"

"No. Are you?"

"Not if you hold my hand." Jude began to embrace her again. "No, just hold my hand. We could go on like this forever, and then everything would be spoiled. We'd grow old, quarrel, stop caring for each other. I don't want that to happen. Do you think it will be the same for them as it was for us?"

"It couldn't be any different."

"It was beautiful," Jessy said.

"Now?" Jude asked.

"Now," she consented.

Jude helped her to sit down at the edge of the hopper, then took a seat beside her. The opening was barely big enough for their two bodies. Jessy's hand tightened around Jude's fingers: the signal. Together, they slid into the machine. There was no pain, only a cessation of consciousness. Atoms slid loose from their chemical bonds instantaneously;

what had been Jude and Jessy was now only increments of elementary matter in the storage chamber of the Reprostat. From those atoms, anything could be reassembled: food, clothing, a pet canary—anything that the machine possessed an Archtype of—even another Jude and Jessy.

In the next room, Jude and Jessy slept next to each other. The sodium pentothal was beginning to wear off. Jude's arm lay across Jessy's shoulder, where the newly-disintegrated Jessy had lain it before leaving them.

Jessy stirred. Jude moved his hand.

"Do you know what day it is?" she whispered.

"Hmm?"

"It's starting," she said. "This is our last day."

"It will always be that day, honey."

She began to hum a song: Now, now, now, now—Now is forever.

*For ever wilt thou love,
and she be fair!*

AT one o'clock, the last of the revelers having departed from the bank, Lester Tinburley dragged Archold's body to the Cadillac in the street outside. He found the ignition key in Archold's pocket. It was an hour's drive to the president's suburban home—or a little longer than it

took to smoke one of the cigars from the Reprosaat on the dashboard.

Lester Tinburley had come to work at the New York Exchange Bank in 1953, immediately upon his release from the Armed Services. He had seen Charles Archold rise from the bond window to a loan consultant's desk to the accounting office on the second floor and eventually to the presidency, a rise that paralleled Lester's own ascension through the ranks to the lieutenantcy of the janitorial staff. The two men, each surrounded by the symbols of his authority, had had a common interest in the preservation of order—that is to say, bureaucracy. They had been allies in conservatism. The advent of the Reprostat, however, changed all that.

The Reprostat could be programmed to reproduce from its supply of elementary particles (some sub-atomic) any given mechanical, molecular or atomic structure; any *thing*, in short. The Reprostat could even reprostat smaller Reprostats. As soon as such a Machine became available to even a few, it would inevitably become available to anyone—and when anyone possessed a Reprostat he needed very little else. The marvellous machines could not provide Charles Archold with pleasant sensations of self-justification in the perform-

ance of his work and the exercise of his authority, but only the vanishing breed of the inner-directed required such intangible pleasures. The new order of society, as evidenced in Jude and Jessy, were content to take their pleasures where they found them—in the Reprostat. They lived in an eternal present which came very close to being an earthly paradise.

Lester Tinburley could not share either attitude perfectly. While Charles Archold's way of life was only affected adversely by the new abundance (he had been able, as a bank president, to afford most of the things he really desired) and Jessy and Jude indulged themselves in Arcady, Lester was torn between the new facts of life and his old habits. He had learned, in fifty years of menial work and mean living, to take a certain pleasure and a considerable amount of pride in the very meanness of his circumstances. He preferred beer to cognac, overalls to a silk lounging robe. Affluence had come too late in his life for him to do it justice, especially an affluence so divested of the symbols with which he (like Archold) had always associated it: power, the recognition of authority, and, above all else, money. Avarice is an absurd vice in the earthly paradise, but Lester's mind had

(continued on page 130)



JAM for CHRISTMAS

By VANCE SIMONDS

Illustrated by SCHELLING

From the Moon, the great annual Christmas show was about to hit the world's TV sets via syncrom—if the Reds didn't manage to jam it. And jam it they would, unless telepath Everett O'Toole and his mongoose could beat them to the punch.

CAM looked out the shuttle's overhead viewport. It was nearly midnight Greenwich time, but the pale sun still hung cheekily above the jagged grey lunar horizon. Below them, the shuttle's shadow raced them to their destination over desolate craters and crags. *At least, thought Cam, we're nearing moonfall.*

Beside him, the unlikely—and unlovely—Everett O'Toole stirred and began to surface from his boozy slumber. "Well—have we arrived at Coldsville yet?"

"Almost," answered Cam. "Get set to fasten your seat belt—if you can."

"Big deal. Big bird colonel," Ev grunted, eyes still closed.

"We are now passing over Tycho Crater," intoned the intercom. "Estimated Time of Arrival at Luna City: approximately 2355 hours Greenwich."

"There's Copernicus," said Cam a few moments later.

"Synchronize your mukluks," muttered Ev, peering past Cam at the forbidding, frigid waste below.

"You'd beef if we drew a mission to Tahiti, if it involved work. How do you think the G.I.'s feel, stuck up here for six to twenty-four months?"

"This is the kookiest caper since the Hike Against Hypochondria. Let's tell the driver we'll stay aboard for the return

trip to that spaceborne Monte Carlo."

"Venture IV, you jerk," said Cam, stubbing out his *cigarillo* as the craft began descent. "You hold a reserve commission in the Truth Corps too, my lad. One false move, and you dig the brig. This is a paramilitary bit; the Sovs are trying to louse up the Xmascast."

"Oh, I see!" Ev sat up, doing an exaggerated mime of wide-eyed innocence, as the ship gently sat down on the southwest "shore" of Mare Imbrium. "The captive peoples will see Mona Martinez, and rise in revolt against the cruel tyranny that gives them only tank-style broads. In this one stroke, we may win the War For Men's Minds! Thank you, Colonel. I do understand, now."

After a glance that Cam classified as Utter Contempt, Condition Red, Everett O'Toole rose and joined the debarkation file, followed by Cam, chuckling.

With the precision of long practice, the shuttleship had come to a stop within a few feet of the port's airlock. Each of the two-dozen passengers was wearing special waffleweave "thermal" underwear and layers of woolens, over which each donned a spacesuit before exiting one by one. Crouching down to peer through the port again, Cam

saw the Apennine peaks sparkling in the sun's rays. The moonsea itself sat drowned in jet-black shadow.

THE address system crackled into life again: "Outside temperature now at Luna City, -236° Fahrenheit. Inside temperature, 0°." The artificial gravity went off and suddenly Cam felt like floating.

"I want off this ice-truck right now," said Ev wildly, peering round for an escape.

"Precisely what we have in mind," said Cam, helping the round one into his suit and fastening its helmet over his frightened face; then, planting one foot in Ev's buttocks, Cam yelled: "Geronimo!" The O'Toole zoomed through the compartments like a runaway torpedo.

Cam made pretty good time, too, in spite of pausing for a double-take at the bust of Admiral Richard E. Byrd surrounded by several towers of electronic gear like a surrealist Stonehenge.

Once inside, Cam found himself on the level platform evidently serving as reception area. The preceding passengers were being taken in tow and led down an inclined tunnel, from which some stalactites appeared to be dripping. Breathing like a calliope, Ev bounded up to pump his hand. "Never thought you'd

make it, pard. It's a bad scene. Looks like some kind of a lab under the dust where they're trying to duplicate conditions topside. Best we split back for the big wheel and ole terra firma."

"Relax and be glad you only weigh about 50 pounds," said Cam, shedding his suit. A doughty old badger in the uniform of Vice Marshal, United States of Euramerica, Space Force, was puffing his way through the group of debarkees toward them, fissioning off lesser officers to take charge of the other passenger groups after brief salutations. This was the moment that Mona Martinez, current Miss Heavenly Body, chose to make her entrance, charging up the incline toward the reception level, beautifully oblivious to all the stares that pursued her. Even dripping furs, the kid still reeked of sex.

"Hello, Cameron," she breathed, gracefully skidding to a stop just in front of the Marshal, and draping a hand at kissing height. Cam grasped it and brought it down to shaking level.

"Hi, Mona. Meet my sidekick, Everett O'Toole, hapless focal point of the Free World's psi gestalt."

"How cute," oozed Mona. "When did you meet Cam, Mr. O'Toole?"

"In his previous existence as a Hollywood adman, before we

were captured by a Truth Corps press gang," said Ev.

"He and I used to work, and play, together," said Mona dreamily. "Gentlemen, this is Vice Marshal Sir Harlow Fuley—"

"Dudley," grunted the gold-enshrined Britisher.

"Dave Gargan, my public relations counsellor—" She waved at a relatively well-set-up chap with wavy hair, bobbing at her elbow.

"Flack," commented O'Toole.

"—And our producer, Scatter-good von Stroheim."

"No kin to Erich," stated that stocky, bald individual. "How'd they ever get you wind merchants up here, away from your Forever Martinis?"

"Always wanted to do a show on the rocks, Scatter, old son," said Cam. "Do we stand here all night, or are there unsuspected depths to this operation?"

"Of course, Colonel," said Sir Harlow. "This way . . ." The Marshal led them down the ramp into the central service tunnel, spilling like a guide with a stiff upper lip as they passed the side tunnels to the nuclear plant, communications gear, fuel, food, and materiel storage areas, and the "garage" that housed the Mark XIV Dust-Cats.

"For that matter, Scatter," came Ev's voice from behind Cam and the Marshal, "how do you survive without your little

playmates from Transoceanic Casting?" Von Stroheim was widely recognized, back in the freeway/monorail jungle of the SoCal megalopolis, as a true connoisseur of Polynesian youth.

"Boys, boys," Mona remonstrated.

Cam wheeled, just as Scatter-good's brow darkened and he appeared ready to launch himself like a truncated Teuron warhead at O'Toole. "Hold the countdown, you guys! We've got a show to do!"

"Yes, teacher," mumbled the rotund telepath. "Only, when does it get warm?"

O'TOOLE had a point there. The Marshal explained that the tunnel temperature was kept at about -10° F. to prevent melting of the interior ice sheath during the 212° day.

"You guys are in charge, according to the Communications Ministry directive," said Scatter-good. "Which doesn't mean we have to like it."

Mercifully, the Marshal turned them into the "residential" tunnel, lined with pentagonal pre-fabs and flanked with electrical/electronic transmission poles.

He led them up a short flight of steps into one of the first pre-fabs, through a heat-lock foyer about the size of a visiphone booth, into an "office" that appeared to occupy the rest of the

building. The temperature seemed to be about 50° above. Its walls and ceiling were painted in warm pastels, a welcome relief from the gray-green tunnels, and its other Earthside accoutrements were like a letter from home: There was a long, pseudo-mahogany conference table, around which Cam and the rest gratefully deployed themselves into the cushioned chairs; framed, lunar charts and photos hung on the cheerful walls; a single visiphone was set up near the head of the table, where the Marshal took his seat. There were even ashtrays, memo pads, and pencils at each place; and an austere portrait of President Winston himself frowned down upon them.

"It's good to be back in familiar surroundings, sir," smiled Cam at the Marshal. "I've spent most of my waking life in similar environments."

"Most of your sleeping life, too," remarked Ev; and the solemn faces around the table—those of Sir Harley, Mona, Dave Gargan, and even Scattergood—relaxed into smiles.

"Well, it seems that the ice is broken," chuckled the Marshal. "So, without further ado, I'll turn the meeting over to Colonel Schoft."

Cam addressed himself first to Scattergood: "You're still producing the 'cast. The Truth

Corps is solely concerned with its unimpeded transmission."

"How do the Reds propose to jam the 'cast?" asked the Marshal. "And why?"

"We think we know why," said Cam. "These Christmas specials began back during World War II, and came up with some pretty spectacular morale readings. So they've continued to be 'cast every Christmas Eve in the ensuing decades of 'peace'—which was actually an era of brushfire wars, and military stakeouts in strange, often tough environments . . . All of which contributed to the deep urge for contact between homefolks and servicemen, especially at this time of year."

"So the tradition continued after the founding of the United States of Euramerica," said Scattergood. "So what's the current problem?"

"In the past couple of decades, TV has become widespread in the Commie Complex. According to our Intelligence people, they've been picking some of our Syncom-relayed 'casts. Lately, we've detected special jamming efforts by Intervision and other symptoms that indicate this sort of thing is hitting the opposition in the solar plexus."

"Something about our carefree laughter and *joie de vivre* that louses up their propaganda," said Everett airily.

"I'm forgetting my manners," said the Marshal, turning to his visiphone and flicking a switch that caused a young crewcut to appear. "The refreshment, please." The sailor aye-ayed and the screen blanked at another flick.

"Thank you, sir," said Cam. "It's been quite a long haul from Woomera. Well, you pretty well have the motivational picture by now. The well-fed faces on the screens don't jibe with what the elite has been saying about down-trodden masses and all that moth-eaten bilge. The religious referent is also disturbing, no doubt. Plus, the 'cast itself has a lot of hairy military implications. The Reds can't duplicate the feat; because only we have enough Syncoms in orbit to beam a 'cast directly from the Moon that can be seen anywhere on Earth."

"So the master minds in New York claim that Bogieland plans a bollix," Everett added from his recumbent pose. The Communications Ministry headquartered in New York, although the U. S. E. General Executive sat in Nassau. "Our li'l ole innocent morale-builder stacks up as a threat to their own internal security."

A RATING walked in bearing trays of sandwiches, hot chocolate, and steaming coffee.

Cam and the O'Toole tied in. "But you don't know how they plan to jam?" asked Scattergood. Cam, mouth full, nodded. "Well, here's the technical scan for the 'cast: We'll stage the show here at Luna City, which has beaucoup nuclear-type juice, and an auditorium. We've invited all the U. S. E. servicemen from the other moon stations—"

"And the bodies at Lomonosov, Moscovianum, Somnii, Tsiolokovski, Joliot-Curie, etc." said the Admiral, with some pardonable difficulty. "All the Union of People's Socialist Republics' installations on the moon."

"So," resumed Scattergood with asperity, "one of the towers here will transmit to Mount Huygens, which in turn will relay to the Canary Syncom."

"So we can say that this 'cast comes 'to you' directly from Mare Imbrium," said Gargan.

Cam used his napkin and settled back with a sigh. "Good chow, Marshal. Thanks."

"Took *some* of the chill off," grunted Ev.

Sir Harlow acknowledged with a nod, and opened one of the nearest cabinets, revealing a brandy decanter. "We'll have a tot and show you to your chambers . . . Give you a chance to sleep on the situation. Meanwhile, your health, sirs: glad to have you aboard!"

They all tossed down their

"tots", Mona even more quickly than Ev, who, not to be outdone, poured another round, saying: "First time I've felt like a human being in 240,000 miles!"

"I appreciate your feelings," remarked Sir Harlow. "Lucky we've managed to smuggle in a few creature comforts." Magically, there was a box of Havana's finest making the round of the table. There followed a few more toasts—to the United States of Euramerica, the President, the Premier, the Ministry of Communications, Venture IV, the Truth Corps, Euramerican Telephone and Telegraph, the Interworld Broadcasting System, and Mona. Inevitably, O'Toole began to wax poetic about his menagerie of psi-talented life forms, while Cam was attempting to explain to Scattergood that the sabotage might not take the form of jam at all, but might instead strike at the transmission source; especially since they had already taken it upon themselves to hold Open House for a regiment of Red troops, any one of whom might very conceivably be commissioned to do the dirty to some weak link in their electronic chain. The Marshal pointed out that the moon had never become a theater of the Cold War because of a sort of gentleman's agreement; and further that an extraordinarily free exchange of scientific data, supplies ("May I

borrow a cup of thorium?"'), medical skills, and so on had developed in the alien environment.

IN point of fact, the Euramerican and Soviet commands in this sequestered arena had enjoyed the best of relations, and the good-neighbor policy (in the face of the common climatic foe) had been a two-way street ever since the spectacular mercy mission that had saved the life of exchange scientist Matserov back in '81. The current invitation to the U. P. S. R. people had followed routinely within the long-standing policy of maintaining intact the wholesome channel of communications.

During this lengthy briefing, Cam noticed that Ev was becoming more and more vivacious; and in fact was now claiming the honor of a *czardas* with Gargan. "We're pretty beat, sir," Cam said, collaring the O'Toole in mid-gavotte. "If we could be shown to our quarters . . ."

"I'll show you, Cameron," said Mona; and without further ado, Cam and Ev followed her undulating form out through the foyer, into the eerie cold grey of the tunnel.

"And there she goes!" marvelled Ev, eyes fixed to the sinusoidal sway of the Martinez pelvis like a target-seeking mechanism. "Hey, is this whole bloody crypt refrigerated?"

Cam pointed out the fans pouring cold air into the corridor to insure the integrity of the snow-ice "wallpaper". They soon came to a halt at one of the buildings on stilts and Cam propelled the beamish Ev up the steps into its foyer.

"Thanks, Mona. We'll probably make it from here. See you in the ayem, or whatever it is here," said Cam.

The glamor goddess went into her damsel-in-distress routine, grasping his hand dramatically. "Cameron . . ." (breathing heavily, and creating a fair-sized ice fog) "I'm worried—you *will* help?"

A hollow groan issued from within the vestibule. "Come off it, Mona," said Cam, "So it looks like a tough show. I'll be doing all I can—without the histrionics. That's our assignment."

"That rat von Strohjem really spooks me, Cam," confided Mona with a bedazzling shudder. "He's so creepy."

"He goes to the top of the Snit List. Good night, Mona. Thanks for the Guide bit." Cam loped up the steps and into the warm-up compartment before he could change his mind.

Everett, already in long johns, greeted him with a lewd chuckle. "Something about this underground igloo that brings out the old primal urges, isn't there?" grinned the obese elf.

Cam threw his Travelite case at Ev's head, stripped, showered at his most preferred temperature (40°), crawled under the covers, and seconds later was asleep.

NEXT morning, a cheery young two-striper came by to scoop them up shortly after the "Last Call For Mess" from the intercom had finally roused them into a semblance of motion. As in a dream, they followed the youth (one of whose functions was evidently P.R.O. on the Marshal's staff) down further tunnels, while he pointed out the science "labs" in which valuable new astronomical, meteorological, electromagnetic and gravitic knowledge was being developed. He managed to convey the impression that the U. S. E. lunar installations were dedicated mainly to science for its own sake, with the Space Force strictly in a logistical supporting role (except of course for occasional quasi-military activities necessitated by suspicious goings-on at the Commie bases).

The Mess Hall was another friendly pre-fab. "You know, I'm getting so I love the sight of these barns on stilts," muttered Ev as they walked into the reassuring spectacle of tables laden with near-boiling coffee, heavy cream, eggs that had apparently never been powdered, bacon,

rolls, butter, etc.; all being subjected to a merciless onslaught by the officers and gentlemen striving to surround them. Cam and Ev quietly joined the attack, while the indefatigable young P.R.O. kept pitching about how all this represented amazing advances since the days of Gagarin, Glenn, Grissom, *et al.*

"Your point is well taken," Cam had to admit.

"Couldn't agree with you more," added Ev. "Now, if you'll kindly point me back at my sack?"

Scattergood von Stroheim wandered in conveniently; and, after wolfing down the viands in record time, took Cam to the Auditorium while the crestfallen P.R.O. remanded Ev to the custody of his couch.

The Auditorium was the most impressive accomplishment Cam had seen yet. 600 feet long, it was normally used for Initial Environmental Indoctrination classes of all U. S. E. personnel checking in for lunar duty; so it was already set up with a stage, mikes, speakers, screens, wings, and a few hundred folding chairs.

Already all the typical feverish preparations for a Big 'Cast were in progress: Electricians were stumbling over cables and cursing, jugglers were rehearsing in corners, script chicks were rushing about, decorations were go-

ing up on stage and the Auditorium's walls of snow in the best chaotic tradition. Backstage, members of the troupe were squabbling over "dressing room" assignments, just as though they were a five-minute walk from Times Square: relieving their tensions with miniature wars over miniature hunks of real estate.

"We brought the company out by space freighter from Vandenberg," said Scattergood. "It was the most horrible journey of my life. They are like cats and dogs—all rabid."

"I know what you mean. Where will we be operating from?" asked Cam.

Scattergood pointed with some disdain at the control booth. "You and your fat sidekicks will be hooked up in there."

CAM strolled over and peered through the booth window at the two chairs that looked for all the world like the "Hot Squats" celebrated in American folklore. "Just like the latest New York psitronic gear," said Cam. "EEG, blood pressure, pulse, skin temperature—the works."

"I told you we got the Word," said Scattergood. "Personally, I think that psitronics, electroencephalographic microwave modulation, and all the rest of that mumbo-jumbo is so much *merde*."

"Why, Scatter, I didn't know you spoke French." Cam straightened up. "You don't have to believe in any of this, von Stroheim. Just get the show on the air."

The formerly bright-eyed P.R.O. shambled in, visibly bereft of all illusions, and sank into one of the folding chairs. Cam fanned the spark of the lad's interest in life with a short chat about Mona, promised an introduction, and elicited directions back to their pre-fab. En route, he found himself following the right path through the tunnels almost without conscious effort:



another wry reminder of the generally unrecognized capabilities of the vast human sub-mind.

It took about ten minutes of pounding on the inner heat-lock door, which Everett had evidently locked from the inside in a spasm of modesty or some such, before that orotund vessel of vices saw fit to sleepily open up. As the door swung wide, the

seedy apparition scampered back to his cot, bawling complaints.

"Don't cry to me," snarled Cam. "I've been working round the clock while you've stayed 90% comatose since we took off from Woomera."

"Damn, but that Melbourne surely is a good town," said Ev fondly. "Makes Papeete look like Lynchburg, West Va."

"Enough of that spindrift.
Time to dig the Group."

"You're such a taskmaster," yawned Ev. "Don't happen to have a Tequila Sunrise in you pocket, by chance?"

"Fortunately, no. But given a good seance, I might disclose the route to the Officer's Club."

"You mean they've got one here?" Ev leaped into the air like a goosed goony-bird, and unveiled from amidst his luggage a shrouded cage similar to that used for transporting puppies and other small domestic fauna. A twitch of the shroud revealed Doctor Fu, the super-mongoose, blinking malevolently at Cam with his little red eyes.

"He's pretty peeved at us," said Ev, producing some scaly delicacy on which the mutant rodent fell with fang and talon. "There were some kind of vibrations above our hearing range that bugged him pretty bad on the hop from Venture IV."

"We'll have to figure out another way back home," commented Cam. He sat down, turning the lights down to minimum level, while Ev flowed back onto his sack . . . in this practiced fashion, setting the stage again for communication as a *gestalt* with components sprinkled all over the United States of Euramerica and the neutral lands; in fact, more than half Sol III, its moon, and other satellites.

SYNCHRONIZE your eyeballs," said Cam. With the hypnotic command, Ev went into his own weird version of trance; followed by his knee-high familiar. Cam himself seemed to sink through layers of consciousness (deeper and deeper each trip) in to a grey still sea in which he drifted without effort or external sensory impact . . . He often, afterwards, attempted to rationalize the peculiar mental-emotional state; and could only conclude, amateurishly enough, that it resembled the introspective Hindu disciplines and their imitators. In any case, it seemed analogous to turning off all the sights, sounds, tastes, odors and tactile sensations like the utilities of a house, and lounging alone in the resultant dark limbo —thus able for the first time to become consciously aware of the huge mysterious outdoors: tiny points of light flung across infinite dark deeps, shrill busy insect chatter and perhaps very distant music, rich juicy green of tirelessly growing grass, pregnant smell of fertilized earth, and the feel of force-fields . . . all intimations of a wholly new world, never sensed before above the recognition threshold, beyond the "walls" of immediate environment.

Cam was really still a psi apprentice. To become an adept, one needed an *id* as finely honed

as the fingers, newly sandpapered, of a Jimmy Valentine. His scars and calluses from the Hollywood jungle eroded with every incursion into the *Terra Incognita* of perception beyond the superficial senses. But, despite his mounting score of missions "below the surface", he felt each time like Alice discovering Wonderland. Cam didn't contribute very much to the network yet, other than acting as coxswain for the group and keeper for Ev in particular.

Ev, on the other hand, had to be classed an adept. He was not a full-blown telepath in the original sense of reading the conscious thought sequence of another mortal; no one had consistently achieved that capability, at least in modern times. But, in tandem with Doctor Fu and under the right conditions, he could experience the emotions of others and even influence same: he was a telepath. He functioned as the mastertransceiver of their sub-cortical broadcasting system, with some mutated gland of the super-mongoose evidently performing as transformer or super-powered relay. The other organic members of their "Psi Squad" were like affiliated stations, or "stringers" of a newspaper syndicate.

THE Pathan in Bombay came in first, with impressions of

wild speed, crowded streets, terrified faces and the sickening frustration of being trapped by congestion while in a desperate hurry. There was also a yearning for the uncivilized and hence uncomplicated Kashmir countryside of his youth. Apparently he had resigned his bell-hop job for cab-driving . . . Cam was feeling what it was like to pilot one of the antique internal-combustion heaps through throngs of fatalists and sacred cattle . . . and then the data began to seep through: A transmitter (life source of strange waves) . . . manned by a Red group very like Cam, Ev & Co.: "*our opposite numbers*", working to occlude the Xmascast.

Here Cam could contribute something; though primarily cortical in content, some of it would get through. "*The U. P. S. R.—mainly the Chinese—has set up a supersensory operation, too. Headman is the Panchen Lama, owned by Peiping.*"

Eire; tenant farmer's daughter Culligan communicating: "*One member Red team is Siberian bear . . . kinetic capability spectacular . . .*"

Cam was stunned as the super-mongoose reacted with a crimson blotch of violent inter-species hatred; then an elderly hamster on Venture IV chimed in: "*Interlopers . . . bad noise . . . hidden place . . .*"

Even these few coherent concepts represented an amazing feat when you considered the size of the source.

The group's inner eye flew low over lifeless peaks and craters, recognizably the "other side" of the moon. Cam was again probably the identifying component as their view skated lower, and they saw a triangle of transmission towers similar to those he had noticed from the shuttle's port standing around the Luna City grid. The towers themselves stood on stilts, against which no dust drifts could stack up, causing them to crumple. Vents, hatches, and bright antennae clustered round the towers . . . They could almost see the hamster chattering excitedly: this was where the "bad noise" came from.

More impressions came in thick and fast, like the scenes of an old silent flickie: A complex of huge underground caverns . . . monstrous electrical/electronic equipment, and chattering computers . . . men striving against a terrible new version of their country's ancient ally, General Winter, and an ocean of sculptured dust . . . while other men anxiously awaited something, hunched over ultra-modern communications gear housed in buildings of Byzantine and even more Oriental architectural styles.

And suddenly the effort of sustained contact was too much; at least eight of the "stringers" had been on the line, including the clairvoyant colleen in Galway whose slightest mental touch left Cam unglued; so they broke it off by simultaneous, unspoken assent. Cam, Ev, even Doctor Fu were limp: like dreams, these sessions seemed to last for hours—but by Cam's wristwatch, only twelve minutes normal time had passed.

"Now," said Ev, rising from his couch like a thing from the deep and flinging tidbits to the sleepy but still evil super-monkey, "where's that Officers Club?"

Cam was forced to agree that they had earned a spot at the spa. Doctor Fu was fed some more instant cobra laced with barbiturate, and shrouded for the night; then the two psimen, still punchy from the session, threaded their way back to the pre-fab next to the Mess Hall.

LIKE the Admiral's "office", the Club was surprisingly luxurious—rather a contrast to the Spartan-Life-In-Space routine fed the U. S. E. public by communications. There were non-functional girlie murals, rough round tables, and a stand-up bar like that of the Old (pre-1942) West. Ev bellied up to the hardwood with the sure manner

of a seasoned practitioner and bellowed, "A double of what's ever handiest and hardest, apothecary!"

The Marshal was sitting at a table near the bar. "It's alright, Ned—put it on my chit . . . How's it going, Colonel Schofft?" he asked, waving Cam to a chair.

"Admiral, we have more data on the jam tactics. It appears that somewhere on the Darkside, the Soviets have geared up a counter-transmitter. From this they could beam a strong mix-signal to a Lunik relay at the same time we 'cast—turning our own output into hash. Result, our long-heralded Xmas show comes out garbage on the viewscreens; maybe just in the Red world but probably everywhere."

"And so we score another full-blown fiasco," mused the Marshal.

"Right," said Cam. "Much worse than incinerating a few astronauts. Our own folks take another jolt in the old morale. The Neuts and Reds dig another convincer of U. S. E. technological backwardness."

"Great gambit for them."

"Giant Step Back for us . . . Can we comb the Darkside for their transmitter?"

The Marshal sipped his brandy. "Tall order. They're undoubtedly observing radio silence at present."

"What about visual search?"

"All lunar Stations now functioning are of course underground, as we are. The earlier installations were snuffed out by dust drifts of ten-meter height that crumpled their walls, chimneys, timbers—the works, Colonel. That's why we'd have to look for a few sticks above-ground not presently plotted; roughly comparable to tracking down a cluster of about ten telephone poles in Australia, except that we'd have to spot them from rockets instead of nice slow-flying planes." The Marshal waved for refills. "I've been educated not to inquire into your methods; but didn't your data source give you any closer clue as to location?"

Cam leaned back and looked at the gang at the bar, while thinking about Sir Harlow's excellent question. Mona had swept in on Scattergood's arm, promptly becoming the focal point of a dozen young officers' attention.

"Marshal, the nature of our operation unfortunately precludes a better fix . . . by any of the methods we've worked out so far . . ." Cam's voice trailed off, as the idea burst upon him of using psionic equivalents of such electronic techniques as the triangular fix. "We'll try to get more data."

"Fine. Meanwhile, I'll see about starting a sweep search. Our chaps have developed a pret-

ty keen eye for specks in the dustscape from the rescue operations."

"Let's belay this, Sir Harlow," said Cam as Scattergood strode toward them. "The Bogies know too much already."

"Righto. Most Secret."

"What's so hush-hush?" demanded the producer, pulling a chair up to their table.

"Mona's unlisted phone number," said Cam. "You're no more suspected of leaking information than the rest—as of now. When and if you are, you'll be the first to know, because I'll pull you off this show faster than you fire a grip. How's the show shaping up?"

Scattergood's truculence had crumpled in the face of Cam's tough line of attack. "Ahh, these prima donnas. That big deal comedian—Boan; he hasn't even shown up yet. How can I put together a show with stars that drop out of space ten minutes before air time?"

"You'll excuse me, gentlemen." The Marshal shoved off with a meaningful look at Cam.

"'Funny' Boan never missed a dress rehearsal yet," said Cam. "Speaking of which, when have you scheduled the dress?"

"Tomorrow, the 23rd; 1600. We're taping a few segments tonight. We have to hit the air just 50 hours from now—2000 hours Xmas Eve, Greenwich."

"The primest time of all," said Cam.

OVER dinner, Scattergood told Cam how the comedian, Boan, was probably an enemy agent. He offered as evidence the fact that Boan did numerous shows on the U. S. E. frontiers, and hence had ample opportunity to consort with the baddies. Boan was always lampooning U. S. E. leaders. Maybe he was arriving at the last minute for this Moon-born production because of some occult rendezvous. Etc., etc.

Cam kept explaining that he was not in counterespionage, but rather in counter-sabotage for this specific 'cast; and that only someone now on the scene could be feeding the jammers the exact data on the proposed transmission.

Ev lurched over. "Hey—the hamster's calling!"

"Wha-at?" said Scattergood.

"None of your Nazi business," said Ev. Scattergood pushed back his chair and drew himself to his full five foot eight, as Sir Harlow strode in.

"The fat one said something about a hamster calling," said Scattergood to the Marshal.

"Gestapo," muttered Ev.

"I'd heard rumors that such tiny organisms are operative in your whatchamacallit," said Sir Harlow.

"Psi Squad, Admiral," said

Cam. "Right now we're going to see if he can zero us in on the Red tower."

"Well, Colonel," said Sir Harlow, "there won't be any search. That's actually why I looked round for you. Nassau says belay, with good reason."

"Like?"

"Suppose we do pinpoint their transmitter—then what? We aren't going to vaporize it, or storm it with sub-nuclear weaponry, or do anything else overt to knock it out. The moon is still technically an international scientific preserve, without any national boundary. The Reds have a perfect right to operate their Stations any way they see fit. Including jam. We can't lift a military finger; which throws the whole problem back into your Communications lap."

"Ugh," said Cam. "I'd better report to New York."

"Good show. Somebodys got to come up with an answer in 47 hours." They walked out into the tunnel.

"I believe we may already know the jam source location, thanks to garden-variety logic."

"Wonderful!"

"Perhaps," said the Admiral. "The Soviets established a rudimentary station in Marginis during IGY II. They probably reactivated it, rather than use one of the presently functioning Stations; after all, we do a bit of

visiting back and forth, exchange observers . . . human, of course," continued Sir Harlow, obviously thinking of the hamster.

"Ev, talk to our little chum and see what he's learned," said Cam. He and Sir Harlow walked through the Admin. Tunnel to the Chart "Building". Round its walls, the Admiral pointed out renderings of the basic lunar contours below the mask of dust, other "charts" relating Luna to the Earth and currently extant satellites, and detail maps of the *maria*.

THEY stopped at the big projection of the sector just north of the lunar equator which included Crisium, Marginis, Undarum and Smythii—totally featureless except for the U. S. E. Station at Undarum . . . and the forgotten Soviet Station in Marginis, not shown on recent activity maps.

"You're right, that must be it," said Cam.

"All the better to jam you with, my dear," said the Admiral. "And I herewith chuck the oblate spheroid back to you. My orders from Nassau read, 'Do not instigate shooting incident.' The 1969 treaty declaring the moon inviolate as an international scientific preserve still stands—one of the few that do; and perhaps that's why it's important to Defense not to involve the moon in

another bloody 'border' affray. In any case, we continue to stand ready to defend our Station—and your 'cast therefrom—from any military interference or other physical incursion. I'm sure you appreciate the logic." Sir Harlow was obviously not in the least proud of his job at this moment.

"I understand, sir. If you and your people choose to concede this area of responsibility entirely to us, we'll sure try to measure up. Somebody has to."

The Admiral gave a good imitation of being shook, and started to respond; but Cam strode unceremoniously out of the cartographic prefab, down the Admin. Tunnel to the "Club".

Sure enough, Ev was coiled around a tall flagon, regaling a bevy of skeptical young officers with fictitious Psi Squad exploits.

Cam clapped him on the shoulder; and, as Ev turned, disengaged the beaker with relative ease. "We've got a quick job."

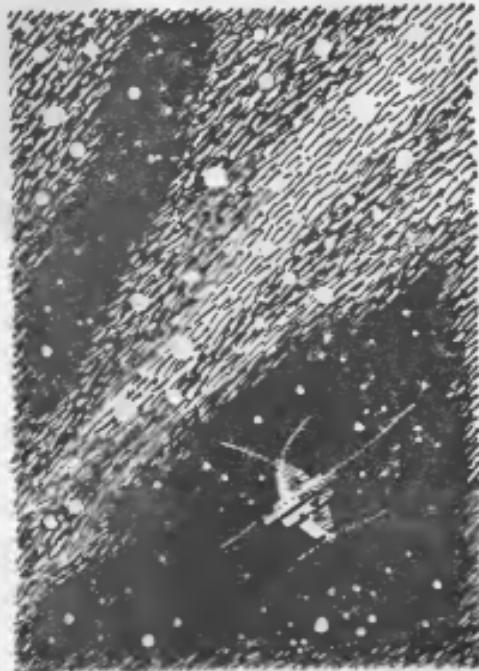
"Can't fight one bloody battle without me services," bawled Ev for the benefit of his erstwhile disciples. He was lapsing into brogue, always a bad sign. Cam pulled him into the head.

"I need a reading on von Stroheim fast. *Sit.*" At the hypo-command, Ev plunked his generous afterparts on the john, his features congealing in the characteristic expression of gestalt rev-

erie. "You are Scattergood von Stroheim."

"Yes," said Ev in Scattergood's piping voice.

"What is your attitude toward the United States of Euramerica?"



"The U. S. E. is a degenerate collection of mongrel races governed by a ridiculous polyglot of proliferating bureaucracies, foredoomed by the cross-purposes of inefficiency and conflicting interests. Its one hope of survival lies in reorganization as a single monolithic state, in which every

class, every race, every trade knows its function and performs its assignment!" Ev, possessed, was pounding the wall in frenzy.

Lordy, thought Cam, I was afraid it would be like this.

EV-SCATTERGOOD was in full cry: "We will make one finely honed weapon of the human race, overrunning the Reds in the process . . . Today the planet, tomorrow the solar system—then, the Galaxy" Ev was screaming.

Knocking at their chamber door: "What the hell's going on in there?"

"Everything's fine," answered Cam. "Just a little seizure . . . Scattergood, how do you feel about the U. P. S. R.—the Communist world?"

"I HATE THEM!" screamed Ev-Scattergood, leaping up from the stool. "Mongols! Asiatic hordes! Our foes since the first time!" He was frothing.

"Okay, okay: *Arise.*" At Cam's command, Ev shambled to his feet like a punch-drunk Kodiak and splashed his face in the sink.

"I can't stand these hate orgies, Schofft. That's the reason I drink."

"As good a reason as the next," said Cam. The door opened, and the barman thrust in a worried face. "Everything's under control," Cam reassured him. "My friend only has these attacks two or three times a year."

"Pulse puppy," spat Ev, using the currently worst insult in Communications. "That's the end of my credit here."

"Just sign my name like you always do," said Cam. "We now have a valence on von Stroheim."

Ev shuddered at the memory. "He doesn't even like himself a damn bit."

* * *

Cam found Scattergood at a table, and pulled up a chair. "Scatter, old son, I want your help in a top secret maneuver."

"At last you recognize your real ally! Eat!" He commandeered a steward to take Cam's order.

"Thanks," said Cam. "Now here's the scan. Tomorrow, do the dress as planned—with live cameras. We'll tape, giving you a look at the flaws, and me a chance to spot the vulnerable link in the transmission chain. It's like a dress for the engineers, too."

"Like a test shot," mused von Stroheim through his Mushrooms Maltese.

"What a break," said Cam. "A loyal producer with brains! Right, Ev?"

"Right, Cam!" Ev peered opaquely from his post at the rail. "'The play's the thing wherein we'll catch the conscience of the King!' . . . Right Scatter?"

"Uh, yeah, Shakespeare . . . *Hamlet*," said Scattergood.

"Danish Nordic," said Cam. "Arrange it." He left for the Comshack to clue New York about his plan.

NEXT ayem, 'Funny' Boan's rocket touched down, and the 'cast's principals—Mona all a-quiver, Gargan and his Rollei, and even Scattergood—swarmed up the ramp to the Reception vestibule. Meanwhile, Cam through Ev ran a fast reading on Boan and dug a self-interest so monstrous as to preclude any predilection toward democracy, socialism, or other abstract concepts. And as a pro should, Boan came on like a champ at the dress. Matched with Mona, he gave the spectacular that intangible called Star Quality.

While his platoon of hangers-on was invading Luna City, commandeering creature comforts, Boan appeared to sense the special importance of this show—and gave the performance of his life. He made Mona seem wholesome, he made the Station's volunteer band feel like competition for the fabled Free World Marching Music aggregation; in short, 'Funny' Boan made the dress shimmer and sparkle in the air like an old-time Fourth of July.

In the control room, Cam told Ev at the sign-off: "Sounds good."

Ev took off his phones and stroked Doctor Fu. "Is good."

The director turned from his console. "What a beaut! Why is a dress always better than the 'cast'?"

Von Stroheim bounded into the booth with conspiratorial glee. "Colonel Schofft, the show should be so good!"

"I'm sure it will be," said Cam.

NEXT morning, Cam had further coded conversation with ComCentral in New York, which confirmed that the Reds were really ballyhooing this one. The "line" was patronizing ridicule of the "imperialist attempt to propagandize from the space frontier pioneered by Soviet heroes."

"The cat's smacking his chops at the Canary cage," said the Marshal at lunch.

"We'll see," said Cam.

The cast went on as scheduled. After about three minutes, the Admiral burst into the control room. "Well, they did it! Venture IV says Syncrom is getting our signal hopelessly hashed up—probably by a neighboring transmitter."

"Well, can't win 'em all," shrugged Ev.

"We tried, Sir Harlow. Without military backing, the mission never had a prayer. Let's still put on a good show for the boys here." And a good show it was, though not up to the dress. After sign-off, Boan and Mona reap-

peared in Santa and Mrs. Claus costumes to distribute gifts round beautiful, incredible fir; and not one G.I. felt even slightly short-changed.

Members of the troupe together with various Station ranks and rates were gathered round the bandstand singing carols and other old service standbys when the teletype operator raced in clutching a sheaf of messages:

**"CONGRATULATIONS EXCELLENT
'CAST PLEASE CONVEY MY BEST
PERSONAL REGARDS ALL PARTICI-
PATING GEOFFREY WINSTON PRESI-
DENT UNITED STATES OF EURAMER-
ICA."**

**"WELL DONE MONTAN COMMUN-
ICATIONS."**

Others arrived from the Royal Family ("Hurray! A medal!" yelled Ev), the Comte de Paris, the Chancellor of the Fourth Reich, the Governors General of Canada and Australia, and the President of the Union of North Africa . . . "Are there any vice-roys not yet heard from?" asked Ev.

Cam and Sir Harlow retired to the "Club" where a corner table was already garnished with cigars and brandy.

"Obviously the cast was received beautifully in the clear all over the globe," said the Mar-

shal. "Ready to brief the lower grades?"

"Piece of cake, sir," said Cam. "We simply taped the dress rehearsal in New York via Syncrom and then rebroadcast that dress tape tonight from New York. We even stayed with the Azores Syncrom (plus Advent for insurance) successfully: The New York signal hit at an angle of about 165° to the Marginis line-of-sight, with all the power that the laws of energy allow. The jam was slammed."

"Funny" Boan strolled in with Mona and their combined retinue, screaming, "There's some *Red* faces tonight!" Celebration swiftly became the order of the evening.

"What about the Great Leak Mystery?" asked Sir Harlow.

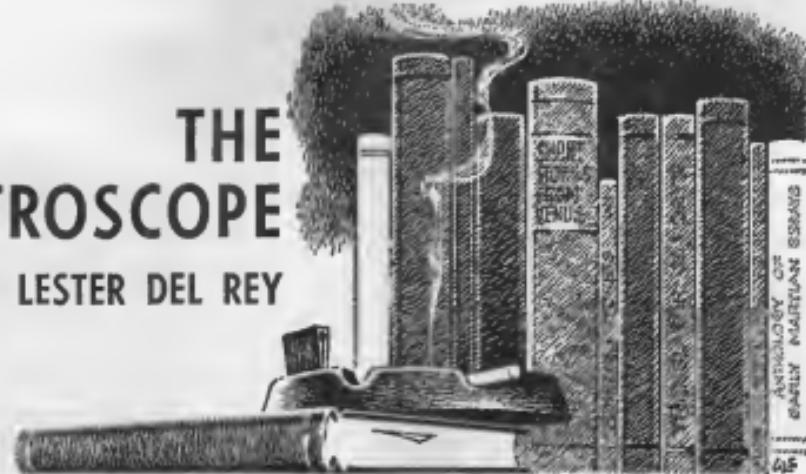
"I cast him as the unwitting culprit," said Cam, pointing at Gargan brightly dancing attendance on "Funny" and Mona. "His releases spelled out every datum, from the power of your transmitter to the size of Mona's cups."

Ev caromed to their table. "From Latvia to Laos, commissars tuned in for the fiasco. Instead, they saw a rather good U. S. E. spectacular—from the moon, exactly as advertised."

THE END

THE SPECTROSCOPE

By LESTER DEL REY



Way Station, by Clifford D. Simak. 210 pp. Doubleday & Co. \$3.50.

There are still a few men left in the world who write science fiction as if they love it, though they are becoming rarer with each year. One of the best of such writers is Clifford D. Simak. Happily, the present book is a fine example of the abilities he has developed over a quarter of a century. I started glancing through it to refresh my memory for this review and wound up reading and enjoying the whole book all over again.

It is obviously a book meant for enjoyment, not for argumentation at a fan club. There are no new theories of politics, sex or religion, and no deliberate shock elements. In fact, the whole basic idea here is one that seems completely familiar. Earth is a

slightly backward culture in a galaxy of civilized races. Now Earth is being used as a way station for some kind of transgalactic travel. Wallace, the hero of the story, is the keeper of the station. It's his job to take care of the travelers and to keep Earth from knowing anything about it.

The trouble begins in the first chapter when the government finds out that Wallace is the same guy who was a hero in the Civil War and who apparently hasn't aged much during the century since then. Earth begins to investigate him and his queer house. He discovers this, and he knows that if they find the truth it will mean the end of the Way Station on Earth—and the end of any chance for him to persuade the aliens to help Earth. That, as he sees it from a hun-

dred years of study, means almost certainly that Earth is going ahead with an ultimately dangerous war. He can't reveal the facts to the aliens, nor the aliens to Earth. And then he discovers that he has become a focal point in a dangerous power struggle going on among the alien worlds.

Wallace is one of the best characters Simak has yet given us. He's something of the strong, silent man who was tempered in a hundred battles and weary marches; but he's also an intelligent man who has been exposed to a century of Earth's development and of alien knowledge. He's a completely independent man who is singularly sensitive to his complete dependence on an untold number of cultures. He would seem believably at home in a Western adventure or in a contemporary problem novel.

Some of the other human characters are less believable and more stereotyped, but they are at least adequate for their purposes in the story. The aliens, on the other hand, are excellent. Even when we only meet them briefly or hear mention of them, they are a constant pleasure. They aren't all perfect; Simak seems to feel that all races, including ours, are imperfectly perfect. At least one of the aliens is hardly a character we'd like to meet under any conditions. But they are con-

sistently colorful, individual, and emotionally important.

Perhaps the greatest weakness in the story lies in two seemingly human characters who are as alien as any non-humans could be. These are the Shadow People—sometime companions drawn from Wallace's own younger loneliness by alien science and now on the borderland between the imaginary and the real. Simak has explained them in the story, and has even developed one of them into a fairly whole individual. But I'm still not happy with either the explanation or their place in the novel. They seem to be there to make some point about the emotional state of Wallace, but that is quite clear without them. To me, they obtrude as much as mermaids in the Martian Drylands. But this is only a small quibble, since they aren't major characters in the story.

The background of the story is rural, as is often true of Simak's stories. For some reason, this "pastoral" locale seems to bother some of my more sophisticated fan acquaintances, who seem to feel that Simak is looking backward nostalgically toward the simple, bygone days. I fail to understand why it's wrong for any man to hate the needless abandonment of simple pleasures when they might just as well be used together with modern ones.

And here the rural background is far from simple. Neither Wallace nor the writer seems in the least nostalgic; in fact, some of the ugliness of the conflict stems from the isolated life of a rural community.

The solution to the mixed problems facing Enoch Wallace isn't wrapped up in a rosy glow of total optimism. Yet it's one that is as completely satisfactory as it should be. "A million years from now there would be, if not Man, at least a caring thing. And that was the secret of the Universe, Enoch told himself—a thing that went on caring."

Obviously, Clifford Simak is a man who goes on caring and writing about the things for which he cares. That's the thing all writers are supposed to do, whether they work in the so-called mainstream or in a specialized field like science fiction. And because he does his work with warmth and passion, he may succeed in making his readers come a little closer to his concept of a caring thing.

Glory Road, by Robert Heinlein.
288 pp. G. P. Putnam's Sons.
\$3.95.

According to the dust jacket, "this is one of the very best yarns yet from a master story teller." That statement is fairly honest for such copy, since it is

at least half true; Heinlein is a master story teller. It's too bad that the rest of the blurb statement couldn't be equally true.

The chief trouble with this story is that it isn't one story, but a series of disparate parts leading almost nowhere. In the beginning, we have some highly enjoyable character development with Heinlein's comments on the current state of things—always the best part of any Heinlein story. But just when we've built up an image of a realistic and perhaps too level-headed hero, he drops everything and goes off on an unknown quest for unknown goals through unknowable perils in typical swashbuckling fashion. Then we get a middle section with Heinlein partly experimenting with sword-and-sorcery and partly satirizing it. Somehow, though, the pearls never quite seem real. And when we're about two-thirds through, we suddenly find that they were all set-ups, and that the hero wasn't a real hero, after all, except for one brief moment. Then we get a long section where he should have lived happily ever after, but gradually decides to give up his rewards. Having done so, he finally sets out again on the glory road he's just abandoned.

There's a good deal of commentary on "adult" sex attitudes in the story. Somehow, all this adult attitude begins to seem

rather adolescent somewhere along the line. I notice that the hero makes sure he'll marry the girl before he really has anything to do with her, willing though she is.

It's a shame, because this is basically a fantasy, and I've found Heinlein's fantasy even better than his science fiction in the past. But this isn't a book I can recommend.

The Fury from Earth, by Dean McLaughlin. 192 pp. Pyramid Books. 40¢.

This is a curiously uneven book, but one I found generally rewarding. McLaughlin has thought out his background and his technical details so well that his story is often most interesting when the plot development is least exciting. He gives a background of a Venus colony after the successful revolt against the mother world that is completely believable. He also provides a shocking weapon and a method of beating the limitations of the speed of light that are more than mere names or evasions of the problems. Obviously, a lot of hard thought went into this, and it's a delight to see such care.

For those interested in love and sex attitudes on at least one adult level, McLaughlin has provided some of the best insight

possible to a world where all the ancient fears and taboos are gone. This is particularly effective since the viewpoint is from the eyes of someone brought up in a society where the proprieties closely resemble those we are supposed to observe today.

Unfortunately, some of the straight plotting is too slight for the excellent work in all other aspects. There is a rather routine and improbable sequence where an amateur spy has to get into the jams amateur spies get into in fiction. And at the end, there is not enough attention to wrapping up all the various threads of the story. The hero's personal problems are solved well enough. But here some of the excellence shown in developing the whole Venus culture and the background of the conflict requires that more attention be devoted to the outcome of the trends we have seen there. This is largely brushed off. Many of the things that will happen are implied, but they should have been explicitly resolved. A lot of the problems we do see there are more interesting than what will happen to the chief character of the plot could possibly be.

Still, the virtues of the book far outweigh its faults, which is all anyone can reasonably ask of any novel.

... OR SO YOU SAY

(Continued from page 6)

today's discriminating reader.

I don't want to see AMAZING go. It is the most entertaining magazine published, in my opinion. Please change the title!

Jeff Rensch

Palos Verdes Estates

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Dear Cele:

"The problem, gentlemen, lies with fandom. We first don't get enough letters with provocative, good, or kookie ideas. Where are the nonconformists?" That, gang, is what ye starry-eyed editor said. Well, floppin' Foundations, ma'am, what do you expect? How long has it been since you've reviewed a fanzine—mentioned a fanzine; commented on an indice; gave us anything to interest us?

Believe it or not, Dear-and-Mighty-Editor, not too many of us give much of a damn about what N.E.O. Fan thinks about Virgil Finlay, or *Podkayne of Mars*, or whatever your trite title column centers on. We want to know *why*. No, fans haven't deserted science fiction, and they aren't likely to. But glance through a fanzine sometime.

You'd find more evaluation, analysis, discussion, and out-and-out fun on one page than in any pro lettercol in existence.

If you want letters from fans—and I mean fans, not mere readers—you'll have to let down somewhere and let us have room to kick things around. Set up a lettercol editor, preferably someone like Sam Moskowitz. Or give us a fnz review column—bet Bob Bloch would be happy in that slot. But gosh and wow, Cele, don't ask us fans to do this by ourselves. We've been screaming about the same problem since the fifties, if not before. No kidding, don't you think it's about time we got together? (And yes, I do edit a fanzine—so you can say I'm prejudiced. Come to think of it, you'd be right.)

Jim Hawkins
112 W. Harding
Greenwood, Miss.

• *Periodically we seriously consider a fanzine review—but we always hesitate to take space away from stories—and we have to think of our readers as well as our fans.*

Dear Editor:

I have just finished reading the November issue of AMAZING. Your story "Savage Pellucidar" interested me. I have read many Edgar Rice Burroughs books and this story didn't have the same
(continued on page 124)



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... OR SO YOU SAY

(Continued from page 122)

feel as his other stories. The story has the same names and places but the style is or seems to be entirely different from ERB's. Would you please tell me if this story is really ERB's or if it was written by someone else but using his name. Please let me have your reply.

Ricky Hautala
26 Stockholm Ave.
Rockport, Mass.

• *It's really ERB's.*

Dear Miss Goldsmith:

Ordinarily I'm no science fiction fan. Your November, 1963 issue is the first new s-f magazine I've *bought* in nearly twenty years—and I bought it solely for the Edgar Rice Burroughs "Pellucidar" novelette which you advertised, with commendable conspicuously, in the yellow ribbon on the cover.

In the strict sense, I don't consider the "Tarzan" books—with the three exceptions of "Tarzan and the Ant-Men," "Tarzan and the Forbidden City" and "Tarzan the Magnificent;" and possibly a fourth: the amusingly satirical "Tarzan and the Lion-Man"—to be science fiction at all, but adventure stories. The same goes for ERB's "Pellucidar" and "Caspak" series and "The Land of Hidden Men." *Fantastic* they all are, of course

(did Burroughs, I wonder, *ever* write anything that was *not* fantastic?) but science fiction (if I may presume humbly to submit it as my opinion) they are *not*. Still, I'm happy that s-f magazine editors and publishers see fit to stretch the term "science fiction" to include tales of fantastic adventure, such as "Seven Worlds to Conquer" and "Savage Pellucidar,"—giving us, long-standing and faithful admirers of ERB, the opportunity to read those of his works which we missed before.

Georgia Covington
8402 Frances Ave.
Vancouver, Wash.

Dear Editor:

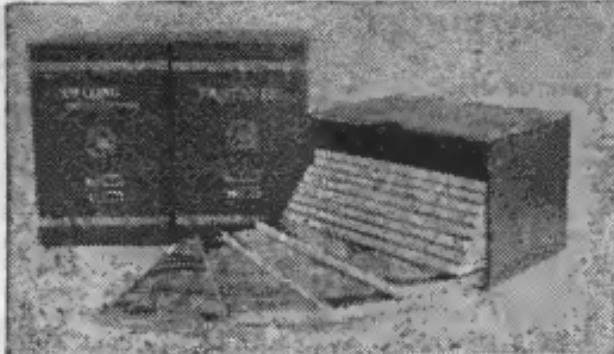
About Paul Brague's letter in December AMAZING: You should not run full novels often because if a reader doesn't like it, his money is wasted. If one section of a serial is no good, it is always possible to enjoy the rest. Once a year you can run a full novel, but be sure it's by an author most readers like.

Your older, more striking covers were better—why not try a few like them to go with your new "logo" and see what readers think.

Michael L. Abrahams

• *Okay. Let us know what you think of the new serial, Sunburst, that starts in this issue.*

(Continued on page 126)



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... OR SO YOU SAY
(Continued from page 124)

Dear Editor:

While most science fiction and fantasy reading involves a "willing suspension of belief", the story "Killjoy" in the December AMAZING goes beyond the limits of what even the most careless reader can endure. The main idea around which the story is built is simply unbelievable. An intelligent being who had never before seen a gun, much less know how to strap it on and draw it, would not be able to react as Javor's "Yalli" does.

The device Barrett uses to get his Saharaites out of their jam is also wildly improbable when you consider the percolation rate of water in soil under earth's gravity—and the moon induced flow would of necessity be much less than that induced by one g.

Philip K. Dick does his usually fine job with "The Days of Perky Pat"—though I fear the man has become obsessed with the theme of *After The Bomb Drops*.

AMAZING's most serious deficiency is its book reviews. Why, oh why, can't you get Knight, del Rey, Silverburg, Garret, G. O. Smith, Moskowitz, or even Lownes to do the book column.

Robert A. Lewis
Penn. State Univ.

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NOW IS FOREVER

(continued from page 97)

been formed at an earlier time when it was still possible to be a miser.

Lester parked the Cadillac in the Archold's two-car garage and wrestled the stiff body of the bank president into the house. Through the bedroom door he could see Nora Archold sprawled on the bed, sleeping or drunk. Lester shoved Archold's old body into the hopper of the Reprostat. The Personal panel on the control board had been left unlocked. Lester opened the door of the materializer. If he had been partly responsible for Archold's death earlier that evening, this was a perfect atonement. He felt no guilt.

He laid the drugged body of the bank president on the bed beside Nora's and watched them breathing lightly. Archold would probably be a little confused in the morning, as Lester had noticed he had been in the office. But calendar time was beginning to be less and less meaningful, when one was no longer obliged

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to punch a time clock or meet deadlines.

"See you tomorrow," he said to his old boss. One of these days, he was convinced, Archold would open the vault *before* his heart failed him. In the meantime, he sort of enjoyed seeing his old employer dropping in at the bank every day. It was like old times.

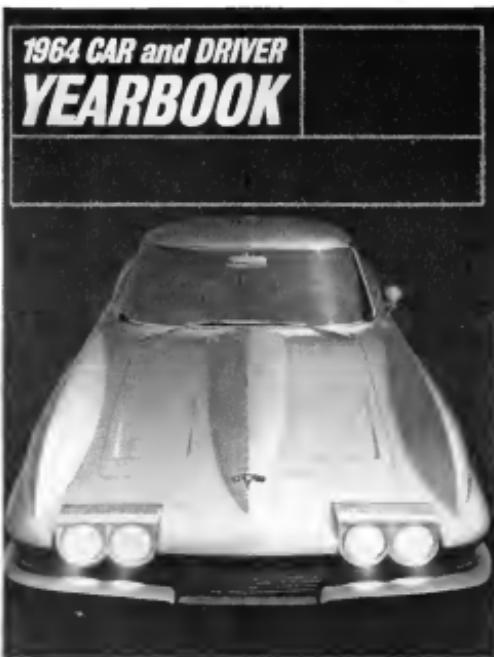
* * *

Charles Archold liked the facade best at twilight. On June evenings like this (or was it July?), the sun would sink into the canyon of Maxwell Street and spotlight the sculptured group in the pediment: a full-breasted Commerce extended an allegorical cornucopia from which tumbled allegorical fruits in to the outstretched hands of Industry, Labor, Transportation, Science, and Art. He was idling past (the Cadillac engine was definitely getting worse), abstractedly considering the burning tip of his cigar, when he observed peripherally that Commerce had been beheaded. He stopped.

THE END

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